# An exploration of barriers and career strategies of female leaders in Nepalese higher education

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## Abstract

Although more women are entering the labour force in Nepal, women's representation in leadership positions remains significantly low. The reasons for women's under-representation have not been researched in the Nepalese context; therefore, the full story remains untold and women's voices are still unheard. Thus, this research aims in providing a voice to those who are unheard by exploring the barriers faced by women leaders of higher education in Nepal through their lived stories and experiences. Moreover, this study also seeks to understand the strategies adopted by successful women leaders to manoeuvre their way into leadership positions. Social role theory, role congruity theory and feminist theory guided this qualitative study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 women leaders (department heads and above) at two large universities in Nepal.

Although several studies have been conducted around the globe but the social and cultural aspects of life in Nepal are different, therefore, researchers argue that the problems cannot be generalised. The findings of this study showed various social, organisational and personal barriers such as patriarchal culture, masculine culture, work-life balance issues, gender stereotypes, negative attitudes, and lack of confidence and determination contributing to women's under-representation in Nepalese higher education. The findings of this study go beyond confirming the existence of role expectations: women are not just expected to play their gender-based roles; they also face criticism for sharing their roles. Similarly, this study also contributes a new argument to the literature; namely, that the mother-in-law plays a substantial role in contributing to women's career progression.

The outcome of the study also showed that successful Nepalese female leaders are changing their way of leadership based on their survival needs. Therefore, this study also proposes a new leadership theory "survival leadership" to define the leadership of Nepalese female leaders. This study also recommends various measures that can be implemented to improve women's representation in leadership positions in Nepalese higher education.

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to all the struggling women of Nepal.

**Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Dr Hong Shi and Penny Adshead, who have provided me with good supervision and guidance throughout my studies. Without their tireless support and assistance, constructive feedback, suggestions and encouragement, this research would have not been possible. The backing and assistance I was given were of enormous help.

Without the support of the wonderful 12 women leaders of Nepalese higher education, this study would have not been completed. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my study. I am indebted to all those participants. Also, I wouldn't have been able to organise those interviews without the support of my friends and families in Nepal, therefore, I would also like to extend my appreciation to everyone who helped me in organising the interview.

My gratitude also extends to my family: my father (Prakash Mainali), my mother (Mamata Mainali), my sisters (Sarbada Mainali and Rakshya Mainali) and my brother (Prashant Mainali), who have been my backbone throughout my life and in this journey. Thank you for everything. I would like to express my thankfulness to my in-laws: father (Narayan Prasad Gyawali), mother (Janaki Gyawali) and sister (Sarmila Gyawali), who have supported me incredibly in this journey. I am proud to have in-laws who believe in and support women's development. My father-in-law facilitates various conferences on women's leadership development and has been my greatest advocate in this study.

And on a personal note, I would like to mention a special thank you to my dear husband Jagrit Gyawali, who provided me with incredible support, love, and encouragement which gave me the strength to overcome all the stress and challenges that I encountered in this big journey. Thank you for believing in me and motivating me to do better every day.

## Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed ……Sarada Mainali……..

Date……12/07/2021…….

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# Abbreviations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UGC: University Grant Commission

HDRO: Human Development Report Office

NDRI: Nepal Development Research Institute

FEDO: Feminist Dalit Organization

SCG: Search for Common Ground

CBS: Central Bureau of Statics

PSC: Public Service Commission

PIS: Participant Information Sheet

MoE: Ministry of Education

HELC: Higher Education Leadership Competencies

ILO: International Labour Organisation

ACE: American Council on Education

GOS: Gender Organisation System

HE: Higher Education

HoD: Head of Department

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The exploration of female leadership started in the 1970s (Jogulu & Wood, 2006), after women started accruing senior positions in organisations and therefore became the catalyst for future gender leadership studies. Although women's access to work and senior roles has been reported to have improved (Sanders et al., 2016), this progress is still not seen as being satisfactory when compared to men's. Therefore, studies on female leadership (e.g., Wilson, 2014; Newman, 2016) are still emphasising the under-representation of women irrespective of the sector they are employed in. Globally, the average Human Development Index value for women is 5.9% less than that for men (UNDP, 2018). Women are disadvantaged in many ways which also includes career progression, as women don't progress as faster as their male counterparts (Ud Din et al., 2018). As Odhiambo (2011, p. 675) stated that "improving women's participation in leadership roles is an important part of the struggle to improve the freedom, rights and opportunities of all the women worldwide", for that women's problems should be brought into the attention, therefore, researchers (e.g., Morley & Crossouard, 2014; Lord & Preston, 2009) have called for more studies focusing on female leadership.

The under-representation of women in the professional world has been acknowledged by various studies (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Shah & Shah, 2012), and the situation in higher education is no different (Burkinshaw, 2015; O'Connor, 2018). Problems related to gender discrimination in businesses, and in universities, in particular, have interested policymakers and researchers for many years. Several theories and perspectives have been developed in order to investigate, explore and understand the causes of gender inequality in higher education. These include the use of the concept of the glass ceiling (Storey, 2019); the leadership labyrinth concept, which describes the difficult journey that women experience while progressing towards senior positions (Mcdonagh & Paris, 2012; Han et al., 2018); social role theory, which justifies women's poor representation in leadership roles based on social responsibilities (Eagly & Wood, 2016); the observed incongruity between gender roles and leadership roles (Paunova, 2015; Koenig, 2018); and the gender organisational approach (Rowley & Yukongdi, 2009; Islam & Jantan, 2017) to address women's under-representation issues around the globe and in different sectors. These theories have guided his study's exploration of women's under-representation in Nepalese higher education.

Despite forming more than half of the population of Nepal, women are still significantly under-represented in all sectors, and this is seen in the higher education sector too. The existence of a patriarchal culture, social beliefs and gender-based role expectations have created prejudice towards Nepalese women, impacting their career growth (Langer et al., 2019; Upreti et al., 2020). Therefore, this study aims to analyse the barriers faced by women at higher education institutions by examining their lived experiences. Despite the existence of barriers, some Nepalese women have been successful in finding their way into senior roles in higher education institutions. Thus, this research sets out to explore the strategies used by successful female leaders in overcoming barriers: the examination of these offers evidence of their practical implications and their effect on overcoming challenges, which may be beneficial for other women as they manoeuvre their way through obstacles. Lastly, suggestions will be provided to enhance female leadership access in Nepalese higher education. This chapter presents the background of the study and a statement of problems highlighting the reason for undertaking this study. Furthermore, the aims and objectives of this study and research questions are disclosed in this chapter. The significance of the study is also presented. The structure of the thesis is presented at the end of this chapter.

## 1.2 Statement of Problems

According to the University of Grant Commission, Nepal, there are nine universities, 1,432 campuses and four medical institutions providing higher education in the country (UGC, 2019). Despite the number of higher education institutions, only 25% of Nepalese higher education positions are occupied by women, and only 12.2% of women are in leadership roles (NDRI, 2017). As there has been a lack of study and focus on this sector, the situation about women's development has not been concentrated on. This fact was also evident in Morley and Crossouard's (2015, p. 39) British Council report on South Asian women in higher education leadership, which reported that "no attention [was paid] to women or gender in the UGC [University Grant Commission] Nepal Annual Report or statistical data". The situation has not changed until now in terms of data being available, or even in terms of women's representation. No further studies have been carried out to address these issues. Therefore, this research intends to plug the gap by exploring Nepalese women leaders' experiences.

Despite the increase in research on female leadership in the past few decades, most of the studies are focused on developed countries. Success stories of female leadership in

developing and underdeveloped countries are still unheard of. Due to the lack of sufficient knowledge, researchers have called for more studies in developing countries to make leadership an aspirational quality for women (Sharma, 2014). Research and studies based on Nepalese female leaders are limited, and most of them focus on politics and business and do not significantly focus on female leadership in higher education. Hence, this research intends to bridge this gap in the academic literature by making a substantial and original contribution. This research will also provide an insight into the success stories of Nepalese female academic leaders, which may prove inspiring for future female leaders. By exploring both the problems and solutions, this study will provide various practical solutions for overcoming the existing problems.

## 1.3 Aim of the Research

This study will identify the barriers obstructing growth in the number of female leaders in Nepalese higher education. The main aim of this research is to explore the strategies adopted by Nepalese female leaders to overcome existing barriers and succeed in senior roles in higher education. The focus is kept on examining women's ways of handling personal and professional difficulties so that the lessons learnt through their experiences of success can inspire current and future female leaders in the higher education sector in Nepal.

## 1.4 Research Objectives

- To identify the existing theoretical concepts related to female leadership.
- To analyse the perceptions of leadership barriers based on the experiences of Nepalese women academics in senior positions.
- To explore what strategic actions were adopted by Nepalese women in relation to accessing leadership positions in the higher education sector.

## 1.5 Research Questions

- What barriers are Nepalese women academic leaders encountering while progressing into senior roles?
- What strategies are Nepalese women academic leaders adopting in order to overcome leadership barriers?
- How can women's access to leadership positions be enhanced in the higher education sector in Nepal?

## 1.6 Significance of this Research

There is limited gender-based research in Asia and particularly in Nepal compared to Western countries (Yukongdi & Benson, 2006). Where studies have been conducted on female leadership in Nepal, the majority have mainly focused on politics and business, with an absence in the area of the higher education sector in Nepal. This absence was highlighted by Morley and Crossouard (2015) in their British Council report, and calling for additional research, this study intends to make an original and important contribution with regard to identifying the challenges faced by Nepalese women leaders in higher education.

Nepalese society has gone through various developments in relation to education and employment. The establishment of numerous schools, colleges and universities is an evidence of Nepal's revolution in educational development; however, this revolution does not necessarily match women's literacy rates in Nepal. It is still not easy for Nepalese women to be working professionals in the Nepalese context. The existing literature on Nepalese women points out various reasons for the gender discrimination that Nepalese women are facing, some of which are discrimination that is the result of social and cultural beliefs and practices, gender stereotyping, male dominance in organisations and the dual responsibilities that women must take on. The majority of the literature on the social and cultural status of women in Nepalese society signals the presence of a patriarchal culture and its negative impact on women. It shows that the patriarchal culture has been a root cause of discrimination against women, which exists from an early age, as boys are provided with all the opportunities to be trained to look after the family in the future, whereas girls are taught to be homemakers. This continues later in life: men are expected to go out and earn money whereas women are obliged to complete their household chores despite working equally as hard as men. The list of such kinds of impacts is long; however, the level of obstacles may be slightly different from one region to another, given that women in rural areas are more likely to face increased obstacles than women in urban areas. Therefore, the main motivation behind this study is to investigate the barriers and problems that Nepalese women are facing in their career progression. As there has been very little research into Nepalese women's experiences, this research will provide insights into these problems.

To get involved in a profession and be acknowledged as a professional in one's field is not yet Nepalese women's right; instead, Nepalese women struggle with these issues and face criticism if they wish to pursue a career outside the home. Although the situation has

improved in some areas of Nepal that have improved education and employment rates; for example, women in urban areas are more educated and employed in professional roles at higher rates than women in rural areas, women still do not enjoy the same freedoms as men in their personal and professional lives. The enduring patriarchal culture and negative social attitudes towards women's engagement have jeopardised women's progress and their individuality in terms of their freedoms and values. Women are expected to be recognised in terms of their relationships with male members of the family; that is, their father, husband and son. Given that the sociocultural stance of Nepalese society is still patriarchal, Nepalese women are still subject to male dominance in almost all stages of their lives, which also includes their decision making. However, some women have opposed such rules and have taken courageous steps to bring about revolutions in their own lives. Therefore, this study attempts to bring to light the strategies used by successful women leaders in overcoming these obstacles. Those strategies discussed by the participants in this study will aid other struggling women in overcoming the barriers they are facing and progressing in their careers. Therefore, this research is considered to be of great importance.

This study also offers suggestions regarding the ways that female leaders can be supported and developed as potential leaders. The lack of gender diversity in senior roles in the higher education sector impacts the image of the institution and sector as a whole when it comes to the gender inclusivity (Cottrol et al., 2003). Thus, increasing the number of women in senior roles not only benefits women themselves but also helps to foster diversity in the institutions sending a positive message of inclusivity to society (Burkinshaw, 2015; David, 2015). Therefore, the findings of this study will be advantageous for both the government and universities with regard to formulating plans and policies that support gender equality in the higher education sector in Nepal. In addition, this research can also derive attention to additional studies based on gender and higher education.

## 1.7 Research Outline

This study is divided into six chapters, which are outlined below:

**Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter provides a general introduction to the study, highlighting the situation of women in Nepalese higher education, the problem areas, the significance of the research, the research aims and objectives and the main research question that guides the study.

**Chapter Two: Research Context**

This provides a background for the study by examining the context of the research area including Hinduism and its influence on Nepalese women's roles. This chapter provides further information on women's positions in different sectors in Nepal to understand the overall situation of women before focusing on higher education. A discussion of developments in the education system is provided at the end of the chapter.

**Chapter Three: Literature Review**

This chapter critically analyses the literature related to the topic under study. Since the data related to female leadership in Nepalese higher education is lacking, similar studies conducted across the globe will be used to examine women's under-representation in the higher education sector. Social role theory, role congruity theory and the gender organisational approach are discussed in this chapter, as they guide this study. This chapter examines and debates the various perspectives and findings in this research area. The following issues are examined in this chapter: leadership and leadership theories; leadership qualities and strategies, combined with an exploration of the differences and similarities based on gender; female leadership and the advantages of female leadership; women's under-representation in leadership positions globally; the female leadership situation within higher education; various theories related to women's under-representation; and the three key barriers, i.e., societal, organisational and individual barriers. The strategies used by women in leadership roles in other sectors and higher education are also discussed. This chapter ends with a summary.

**Chapter Four: Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methodology used in this study. The epistemological and ontological lenses used in this study are presented along with the reasoning behind the selection of these positions. Furthermore, this chapter discusses: the method used in the study, the approach adopted for gathering data, detailed information about the interview

scenario and the candidates, a discussion of the reliability and validity of the research, and the data analysis and data presentation. The pilot study, the role of the researcher and the ethical considerations relevant to this study are also discussed in this chapter.

**Chapter Five: Findings and Data Presentation**

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which are linked to the previously outlined research questions. This chapter is split into three major sections, each of which addresses the research questions. The key themes derived from the study and the related findings are presented matching the theme. The major areas are: the barriers that Nepalese women have experienced while accessing senior roles, the strategies and factors that Nepalese women consider significant in their development, and the participant's suggestion on inspiring more women to pursue leadership roles in higher education institutions.

**Chapter Six: Discussion, Conclusion and Implementation**

This chapter reviews the key discoveries of this study in light of the literature. The findings from the interviews are discussed and a detailed interpretation of the outcome is presented, which is linked to the existing literature and existing theoretical concepts. The conclusion derived in relation to the research question is presented. Furthermore, this chapter offers a contribution to the theory and practice of the study along with suggestions for the policy to inspire women into Nepalese higher education. The limitations and recommendations for future research are also presented at the end of the chapter along with a personal reflection on the research journey.

## 1.8 Conclusion

This chapter laid the grounds for the study. The chapter presented the context of the study by discussing the problem, the aims, objectives and research questions, the significance of the study and the structure of the thesis. The next chapter provides insights into the research context and Nepalese women's representation in various contexts including higher education.

# Chapter 2. Research context

## 2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the women's under-representation in leadership positions in higher education, it is first necessary to understand the background of the study area, social and cultural aspects and women's positions in different contexts. Therefore, this section provides an overview of the research background along with culture and its influence on Nepalese women's roles. Furthermore, Nepalese women's position in different sectors of Nepal is also presented to provide a synopsis of the situation of women in Nepal. The development of the higher education system in Nepal is discussed at the end of the chapter.

## 2.2 Background

Nepal is a small developing country that lies between two economic tycoons – India and China. The current total population of Nepal is 28,609,000, out of which more than half of the population (50.4%) is female (UNDP, 2020). The preference for sons over daughters is a typical mindset in Nepalese society, and it has resulted in inequalities with regard to equal opportunities for development linked to health, education and social and economic issues for females from birth (Khanal, 2018). Nepalese society is built on the traditional patriarchal belief that views the man as the head of the family; therefore, most Nepalese women are engaged in family-orientated housework, while men are considered the breadwinner and work outside the home (Adhikary, 2016). Moreover, patriarchal societal attitudes towards men and women have made matters worse. The social and cultural aspects of life in Nepal favour men when it comes to social networking and social capital, while women are deterred from getting involved in social networking as a result of cultural and societal barriers (Luitel, 2001).

However, Nepalese women have slowly pushed their boundaries and have started manoeuvring themselves into the labour force. As a result, the number of women participating in the labour force has increased in good numbers. According to the World Bank Report (2021), women's labour participation in Nepal increased to 82% in 2019. Despite this increase in the number of women in the labour force, only a few women have been successful in key positions. The Global Gender Gap Report on politics (2018) stated that only 18.8% of Nepalese legislators, senior officials and managers are women; similarly,

they account for only 29.8% of professional and technical workers. Except for in the political sector, women's representation in other sectors has not shown any improvement. This issue is even more complex for women from poor and deprived communities and includes Muslims, Dalits and Madheshis; they face the intersection of discrimination multiplied by patriarchal discrimination (FEDO, 2012). This is not only a problem faced by women, as men from marginalised communities also face the problem of discrimination (KC et al., 2017). However, as a result of Nepal being a patriarchal society, women are more exposed to rejection and suppression. The government and policy-makers have also been criticised for viewing Nepal as a homogenised society when it comes to youth and women and for assuming they share the same interests, problems and needs (FEDO, 2012). A survey by Search for Common Ground (2017) specified that a culture of token participation and nepotism in politics is demotivating women. Furthermore, women from economically stronger regions are involved in work more successfully than those from economically poor regions. Hence, factors such as ethnicity, social background, economic power and education make a difference amongst the women who occupy senior roles. It is therefore essential for women to not be homogenised, especially in the context of Nepal, as women from different backgrounds experience different needs, problems and motivations based on their ethnicity, religion, societal background and economic status. The report by Search for Common Ground (2017) further explained the factors responsible for women's low representation in major areas of Nepal; these include a lack of interest in leadership roles, a patriarchal culture and political system in which power is given to men, a lack of competencies and leadership skills and a lack of support for and trust in women.

In order to increase the representation of women in politics, Nepal's government implemented a quota system that provides women with 33% seats in parliament and local government bodies; this has helped women to secure positions in the politics (Rai, 2015). However, this development has not been reflected in wider society and hence the majority of decision-making positions are still occupied by men. As per the figure from the World Bank (2018), only the political sector has indicated a positive result, with women occupying 32.7% of the seats in the Nepalese parliament in 2018. Likewise, the government has also allocated a certain percentage of seats to underprivileged groups such as Dalit, Janajati, Madhesi, etc. However, the majority of organisations in Nepal are failing to follow this policy when recruiting and selecting candidates. A lack of strict rules set out by the government for the

implementation of such policies, combined with a high level of corruption, has enabled organisations to follow their methods of recruitment.

Despite the increase in women's literacy rates in Nepal, which was up to 62% in 2014 from 57.4% in 2011, and the fact that more than half of the total students enrolled in higher education are female (CBS, 2018), women's representation in leadership positions is significantly low. These findings are consistent with Sharma's (2014) findings that despite the growth in Asian economies and the growing population, the number of women in academic leadership roles remains relatively low. The following sections will provide insights into Nepalese women's position in different sectors.

## 2.3 Hinduism and its Influence on Women's Role

Although Nepal is considered a secular country, Hinduism is the dominant religion among Nepalese people. According to the report by the Central Bureau of Statistics (2014), 81.37% of the total population follows Hinduism as their primary religion. Since ancient times, Hinduism has persisted as more than just a religion in Nepalese society: it has formed the basis of the country's societal culture and values. There have been conflicting views amongst scholars about women's role and identity in Hinduism. Some consider women to be as significant as men in Hinduism (Munoz, 2017), whereas others argue that women are valueless (Ong, 2014). Goddesses such as Durga and Kali are worshipped and praised for their powers. At the same time, other goddesses such as Sita and Draupadi are considered to be role models for women, as they were devoted to their husbands (Bhattacharjee, 2020). In the Mahabharat (an old holy book), it is stated that the people who are excluded from the discussion room of a king are "dwarfs, hunchbacked people, lean men, lame and blind men, idiots and women" (Majupuria, 2007). While Nepalese civilisation has come far, women are still faced with hostile beliefs, wherein they are expected to be under their father's influence before marriage, under their husband's influence after marriage and under their son's influence thereafter (Luitel, 2001). This tradition leads women to live under men's terms throughout their lives. Given that Nepalese society is run in line with the religious codes of Hinduism (Dangol, 2010), it may also be the case that the concept of patriarchy in Nepalese society could have originated from the prejudices of Hinduism.

In Nepalese society, men are considered the head of the family. Moreover, only sons are given full rights by society to move the next generation of the family forward by carrying on

the family name and performing death ceremonies and rituals (Nanda & Tamang, 2012), irrespective of some legal necessities to abolish gender-based disparities. Therefore, gender discrimination starts even before birth with the preference for sons over daughters (Sivak & Smirnov, 2019). As a consequence, women are forced to give birth until they have a son. In addition, girls are discriminated against from the day they are born: the preference for sons extends almost to the level that families mourn the birth of a daughter (Nanda & Tamang, 2012).

Although this culture is slowly fading in urban areas due to awareness, there are still other prejudiced views about sons and daughters. From an early age, boys are motivated to be strong, given freedom and are prepared for the outside world, while girls are taught to be sensitive, loving, and caring and are made to remain inside the house to learn housework chores. In Hinduism, girls are given away to the groom-to-be, which is known as the "*Kanya Daan*" (Sharma, 2014). In the majority of marriages in Nepal, the bride moves into the groom's house to live with her in-laws and extended family, and she is treated as an outsider (Gray, 2009). There are certain rules that women are expected to follow when they are in their in-laws' house; these include the in-laws controlling their studies and freedom to go and work outside the home. As the position of family members in a household is based on hierarchy, the mother-in-law is considered the second person in the hierarchy after the father-in-law (Luitel, 2001). As the mother-in-law is also the head of the groups of women in the household, so everyone is expected to obey her rules, while the daughter-in-law is considered to have the lowest position in the hierarchy (Luitel, 2001). Therefore, the daughter-in-law is expected to follow everyone in the house. Having an understanding and educated mother-in-law is favourable; however, women are still expected to seek permission for everything they do.

Despite all these difficulties, Nepalese women are moving into the labour market as a result of the increased focus on gender equality in many areas. Women in urban areas are facing challenges in their work-life balance, and the awareness of gender equality has been increasing as women are becoming more literate and independent. Therefore, Nepalese women are at a critical crossroads between engrained tradition and fast-moving modernism. Given these circumstances, this study is significant as it seeks to understand the perspectives of Nepalese women working in the higher education sector about their own identity in relation to the Nepalese social and cultural context.

## 2.4 Nepalese Women's Representation in Various Sectors

### 2.4.1 Nepalese women in parliament

After a decade-long civil war in Nepal, political stability is gradually being fostered. Since the end of the war in 2006, there have been various political revolutions in Nepal. These revolutions have provided the Nepalese with democracy but at the same time the frustration of living under various unstable governments. Nevertheless, these transformations have somewhat managed to benefit women's movement into political leadership positions. The Constitution of Nepal initiated a mandatory rule for the representation of women in the Nepalese Constitutional Assembly, setting it at a minimum of 33%, which encouraged women to enter politics. Furthermore, The Nepal Election Commission stated that political parties are required to allocate 50% of proportional representation seats to women. Consequently, the latest Inter-Parliamentary Women Report (2017) indicated that 30% of the total parliamentary seats are occupied by women, ranking Nepal in the 48th position amongst 190 countries. Contrasting this ratio with that of an economically powerful nation such as India, which had women-only taking up 11% of seats in its parliament in 2017, we can see that this was a victory for women victory in politics in Nepal. Moreover, Nepal made history in 2016 by electing the first woman president of Nepal (Bidhya Devi Bhandari), the first woman chief justice (Sushila Karki) and the first woman speaker of parliament (Onsari Gharti) simultaneously. These accomplishments should be considered noteworthy for Nepal, which only became a democratic nation in 2008. A dramatic change in the representation of women in the constitutional assembly has also taken place: from 6% in 2005 to 32.7% in 2018. The following table provides further proof of this change.

Table 1: Percentage of Women Represented in the Nepalese Constitutional Assembly

| Year | Percentage of women in the Nepalese Constitutional Assembly |
|---|---|
| 1998 | 3.4 |
| 2006 | 5.9 |
| 2007 | 17 |
| 2008 | 33.2 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 2012 | 33.2 |
| 2014 | 29.5 |
| 2018 | 32.7 |

Source: World Bank Report (2018)

Women's success in parliament can also be considered an enabler for narrowing down the gender gap. The following table indicates how the gender gap is diminishing slowly over time.

Table 2: Gender Gap Ranking for Nepal

| Year | Gender Gap Report Ranking (Nepal) |
|---|---|
| 2012 | 123 |
| 2013 | 121 |
| 2014 | 112 |
| 2015 | 110 |
| 2016 | 110 |
| 2017 | 111 |
| 2018 | 105 |

Source: The Global Gender Gap Index (2018)

### 2.4.2 Nepalese women in government and in administrative roles

In Nepal, the civil service is categorised into three main divisions, i.e., gazetted (professional), non-gazetted (support) and classless (helper). Gazetted members are part of the division for the major 10 areas of services: namely, foreign, administrative, judicial, audit, engineering, agriculture, planning and statistics, forests, education and various. In 2007, the Civil Service Act was introduced, which stipulated that 45% of the total civil service positions were to be fulfilled via open competition. Among those seats, 33% were allocated for women. The Public Service Commission (PSC) is responsible for the recruitment and

selection of civil service staff. It is considered a highly competitive and merit-based recruitment process.

Table 3: Civil Service Level and Gender Statistics

| S. N | Level | Men | Women | Total | Men (%) | Women (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | **Gazette** | **13,884** | **1,967** | **15,851** | **87.59** | **12.41** |
| **2** | **Non-gazette** | **25,340** | **5,711** | **31,051** | **81.61** | **18.39** |
| **3** | **Classless** | **14,037** | **1,404** | **15,441** | **90.91** | **9.09** |
| Total | | 53,261 | 9,082 | 62,343 | 85.43 | 14.57 |

Source: NDRI (2017)

As shown in the table above, in 2017, 62,343 members were recorded as a civil service officer, of which only 9,082 positions were occupied by women. The highest percentage of women's engagement was in the non-gazetted (supporter) division, with 18.39%, while the lowest level of engagement was in the helper (9.09%) division. Only 12.41% of women were in gazetted positions, while men occupied 87.59% of the total positions available. This data confirms the under-representation of women in Nepal's civil service positions.

### 2.4.3 Nepalese women in science and technology

As in other sectors, women's representation in the field of science and technology is also disappointing. According to the data shown below, only 15.5% of the total science and technology managers in various sectors are women, while only 13.9% of managers in the higher education sector are women.

Table 4: Women Managers in Science and Technology

| Sector | Managers | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | Men | Women | Women (%) |
| Government | 805 | 733 | 72 | 8.9 |
| Private and non-profit | 248 | 145 | 103 | 41.5 |
| Business | 128 | 118 | 10 | 7.8 |
| Higher education | 273 | 235 | 38 | 13.9 |
| Others | 23 | 17 | 6 | 26.0 |
| Total | 1477 | 1248 | 229 | 15.5 |

Source: Singh (2013)

## 2.5 Education System in Nepal

The Nepalese education system has a short history. The first school in Nepal was established in 1853 for the elite groups, which meant that only certain high-class groups could join a school (Parajuli & Das, 2013). After the establishment of democracy in 1951, a total of 300 schools were established, with around ten thousand students in the whole country, which yielded only a 5% literacy rate (Parajuli & Das, 2013). Even though education was more accessible, women were not encouraged to join schools due to their traditional position in society. It has been just over a hundred years since Nepal opened its first higher education institution: Tri-Chandra College was established in 1918 (UGC, 2019). This was eight years after the establishment of the parliamentary system after the oligarchy was overthrown. Until that there, was no higher education. The first university, Tribhuvan University, was established in 1959; it remained the only one until 1985 (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). A swift increase in the number of universities occurred after another political change; namely, the restoration of the multiparty parliamentary system in 1990. Following that, the University Grants Commission was founded in 1993 (Parajuli & Das, 2013). Between then and now, the education system has experienced rapid growth. There are nine universities, 1,403 campuses and four medical institutions providing higher education in Nepal (MoE, 2017).

Table 5: Universities of Nepal and Types of Campuses

| S.N. | Universities | Total Campuses | Community Campuses | Constituent Campuses | Private Campuses |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Tribhuvan University | 1,161 | 524 | 60 | 577 |
| 2 | Sanskrit University | 18 | 2 | 14 | 2 |
| 3 | Kathmandu University | 21 | 0 | 6 | 15 |
| 4 | Purbanchal University | 131 | 6 | 5 | 120 |
| 5 | Pokhara University | 62 | 0 | 4 | 58 |
| 6 | Lumbini University | 6 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| 7 | Agriculture and Forestry University | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| 8 | Mid-Western University | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 9 | Far-Western University | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

Source: Ministry of Education Nepal (2017)

The higher education sector in Nepal has made significant progress within the education system and added a significant number of campuses and universities since its establishment. This improvement is also complemented by the increase in the total number of students enrolling in higher education. Table 6, below, shows the enrolment in different levels of higher education by sex.

Table 6: Enrolment in Different Levels of Higher Education by Sex

| Level | Total | Female | Female (%) | Male | Male (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bachelors | 318,753 | 168,147 | **52.8** | 150,606 | **47.2** |
| PGD | 135 | 106 | **78.5** | 29 | **21.5** |
| Masters | 40,652 | 19,791 | **48.7** | 20,861 | **51.3** |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| M.Phil. | 574 | 107 | **18.6** | 467 | **81.4** |
| Ph.D. | 963 | 144 | **15** | 819 | **85.0** |
| Total | 361,077 | 188,295 | **52.1** | 172,782 | **47.9** |

Source: Ministry of Education Nepal (2017)

According to the data, even though more female students are enrolled in higher education, they seem to be dropping out after bachelor's level and at the postgraduate level. Although both genders' participation at the master's level seems balanced, the figure drops drastically for women at the M.Phil. and Ph.D. levels. This data illustrates that more males qualify with higher-level degrees than females, which offers them more opportunities and confidence when applying for senior positions.

## 2.6 Summary

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the context of the study and the influence of Hinduism in Nepalese society and its impact on women. The position of women in different sectors of Nepal is presented to provide insights into the Nepalese women's situation in general. Data evidenced that the Nepalese women are under-represented in senior positions in the majority of sectors of Nepal including higher education. The developments in the education system were discussed at the end of the chapter to provide a background of the sector. The following chapter will discuss the literature related to leadership, leadership theories, the advantages of female leadership and female leadership in various sectors and higher education, along with theories and approaches through which to explore the under-representation of women. Furthermore, various studies related to the barriers to female leadership and the strategies for overcoming them will be analysed critically. The theoretical framework is also presented at the end of the chapter.

# Chapter 3. Literature review

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the appropriate literature related to the research topic. It focuses on relevant empirical studies and theories related to women's under-representation in leadership positions in higher education. Various studies based on women's under-representation around the globe are analysed and presented in this chapter. The rationale for selecting this stream of literature is because it addresses the issue of women's under-representation in leadership roles in various contexts. The amount of literature based in Nepal is very limited; therefore, knowledge obtained from the wider literature sheds light on this study and acts as a guide for this research, which aims to understand women's under-representation in higher education positions in Nepal. The chapter is arranged in line with the research questions. This chapter begins with an overview of leadership concepts. This is followed by a discussion of women and leadership that outlines the advantages of female leadership and examines the literature on women in leadership positions globally before narrowing it down to a special focus on the higher education sector. Thereafter, the theoretical perspective is analysed in order to gain an understanding of the reasons behind the under-representation of women.

This chapter is divided into two major parts: namely, barriers and strategies. The gender organisation system approach provides guidance when examining the obstacles faced by women as they advance into leadership roles; these obstacles are divided into three major types, i.e., societal, personal and organisational barriers. Following this, the strategies for overcoming barriers are reviewed towards the end of the chapter. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary and by outlining the theoretical framework.

## 3.2 Leadership Concept and Theories

### 3.2.1 Leadership as a concept

Leadership is a broad concept in itself, and there are various definitions and theories of it. Even though leadership has been discussed and defined by well-known scholars (e.g., Stogdill, 1974; Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Kanter, 1977), there is still a certain degree of mystery about the actual definition of leadership. As noted by Ralph Stogdill (1974, p. 259), "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define the concept". This statement was made more than 40 years ago when leadership studies were

not even as prevalent as they are now. After reconsidering the 13 distinctive perceptions of leadership, Bass and Stogdill (1990, p. 20) concluded that leadership roles can be defined as "the focus group processes, as a personality attribute, as the art of inducing compliance, as an exercise of influence, as a particular kind of act, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument in the attainment of goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, and as the initiation of structure". Their definition included power, influence, people and goals. Others, such as Northouse (2007) and Rowe (2007), defined leadership as a practice wherein an individual motivates and inspires a group of others to move towards a collective goal. Similarly, Draft et al. (2010) also portrayed the same traits about leadership as influential action which helps people to achieve a goal. In addition, Lacerda (2015) cited that the leadership concept comprises of three key features; namely, people, goals and influence. Some others have defined leadership based on liability and personality, such as Ololube (2013), who stated that leadership includes a kind of responsibility directed at accomplishing particular ends by using the existing resources and assuring cohesive organisation in the process. Jenkins (2013) identified that the basis for leadership is a strong personality and selfless dedication to an organisation.

Vroom and Jago (2007) stated that leadership is difficult to define given that there is no standardised or scientific definition of it. Management and leadership terms are frequently used interchangeably. However, there are differences between the two terms. Management is organisation specific and involves organising, planning, budgeting and controlling, whereas leadership roles involve a formal authority making a group of people work in meaningful ways (Day, 2000). As stated by Burns (1978), leadership is debatably one of the most overserved and still least understood phenomena on earth. Over time, different styles of leadership have been proposed, and there is no one specific style of leadership. As cited by Hannagan and Bennett (2008), there are different styles of leadership, which have been derived from different ways of inspiring people, distinctive sets of goals and diverse kinds of organisations. Nevertheless, Amanchukwu et al. (2015) argued that even though there are many leadership styles, a good leader encourages, inspires and guides undertakings to help accomplish organisational goals.

### 3.2.2 Leadership theories

In the 1840s, the first concept of leadership was discussed by Thomas (1840), with an assumption that every leader is universally destined to become a leader. The traits of a leader

were described as natural, static and universal. Based on the history of great men and their accomplishments, Carlyle proposed the great man theory of leadership. This theory postulated that men are the heroes and only they can possess the characteristics of leaders. However, this theory was criticised later for being male-centric and also for the fact that no scientific validation was provided to support the theory (Ahmed Khan et al., 2016). The early theorist (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991) discoursed that born leader were endowed with certain traits and characteristics that separated leaders from non-leaders, thereby giving rise to trait theory (Ahmed Khan et al., 2016).

In the 1940s and 1950s, trait theory (Stogdill, 1948) suggested that traits are the aspects of personality that differ from one person to another, are relatively stable over time and influence behaviour. In the 1950 and 1960s, a new concept called behavioural theory was proposed, opposing trait theory, which went beyond the moral qualities of a leader to their behaviour. Two studies by Katz et al. (1951) and Stogdill and Coons (1958) identified task-oriented versus relationship-oriented leadership. Analysing the specific human behaviours of leaders, this perspective claimed that leaders are not born but are made. Thus, the concept shifted from a belief in inborn characteristics towards a belief in learnt behaviour. It suggested that leadership is more about what a leader does than who the leader is.

Another theory was proposed in the 1960s by Fiedler (1967): the contingency theory of leadership. It stated that there is no best way to lead and that a leader's effectiveness is dependent upon his or her leadership style matching a particular situation. Furthermore, this theory articulated that the leader must find their way towards effective leadership based upon the situation at hand. Trait theory was also discussed by the researchers Hersey and Blanchard (1969), who proposed situational theory in the 1960 and 1970s; this claimed that traits alone were not enough to guarantee effective leadership: the connection of leaders with their followers and situational factors can also be essential qualities of effective leadership. The situational factor of effective leadership proposes that distinctive styles of leadership are suitable for different tasks and environments (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). Other theories such as servant leadership, principle centred leadership and charismatic leadership, along with others, were developing every year. A popular theory was developed by James MacGregor Burns in 1978, which is known as transactional and transforming leadership. He defined that people who led through social discussions and by emphasising work are transactional leaders; similarly, transactional leaders offer incentives for efficiency. On the

other hand, people who evaluate the potential of their followers and help them to grow individually into leaders are considered as transformational leaders (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Bass (1985) elaborated on the concept proposed by James MacGregor Burns and used the term "transformational" to refer to leadership instead of "transforming" leadership, which has been widely adopted by researchers. Bass and Riggio (2006) found that transformational leaders are considered as having more dedicated and satisfied followers.

Several studies (for example, Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2007; Eagly & Wood, 2016; Guirado et al., 2012) were conducted to evaluate the leadership styles of men and women. The behaviours, attitudes and skills of women were compared with those of men to raise awareness of the fact that women can be leaders although they may not possess the same leadership styles as men.

In addition, most of the research on leadership was conducted by men until the 1970s; this could be another reason for the lack of female leadership examples in the literature and theory. This notion was supported by Jogulu and Wood (2006), who stated that gender differences were seen in the leadership literature after the 1970s when it started to report on the differences between men and women as leaders. Leadership experts Eagly and Karau (2002) believed that women tend to lead in a more participative and democratic manner than men and further claimed that women leaders' success depends on various related factors comprising the work environment and culture. In addition, Eagly and Karau (2002) developed gender role theory, which stated that people evaluate leadership based on the behaviours associated with men and women. This has been proved in many recent leadership studies as being a reason why women are not perceived as being equal to their male colleagues, particularly in environments where masculine styles are preferred (Airini et al., 2011; Koenig, 2018). However, it can be argued that despite the significant number of studies that have indicated that the female leadership approach is effective, women are still underrepresented in major leadership positions.

In contemporary literature, leadership theory is linked to the collaboration of group members with importance on personal and organisational improvement (Ahmed Khan et al., 2016). Transactional and transformational leadership are outcomes of those leadership emergence initiated to differ from specific perceptions of leaders and the leadership situation towards the practices of exchange between the followers and the leaders (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Ahmed Khan et al. (2016) claimed that this process of emerging leadership suggests that the

main focus of a leader is to contribute to others' well-being, with a focus on some form of social responsibility. This also demonstrates the clear development of leadership study.

## 3.3 Leadership Qualities and Strategies: Gender Differences or Similarities?

In leadership research, sex and gender have been labelled differently: the former refers to the biological categories of male and female, while the latter refers to the characteristics considered male and female that are generated culturally (Powell, 2014; Shanmugam et al., 2007). Characteristics such as being aggressive, rational, independent and objective are characterised as male gender qualities, whereas being emotional, sensitive, caring, loving, sympathetic and submissive are considered as female gender qualities (Shanmugam et al., 2007).

Researchers have tried to uncover the relationship between gender roles and leadership styles. It has been found that gender roles are a vital factor that influence leadership styles. Bass and Bass (2008), Eagly and Sczesny (2009)and Gruber et al. (2018) have claimed that one major reason for women's low level of representation in key positions is the difference in leadership emergence between men and women. Paunova (2015) identifies that there are two key forms of leadership emergence, and they are related to social interaction. The initial one is a behaviour-related factor wherein a leader is appreciated for the impact of his/her positive behaviour in helping the team to complete a task (Bass & Bass, 2008). The other is personal characteristics, which are often related to social power. The difference in leadership emergence in men and women is intensified by gender roles (Koenig, 2018). The communal virtues are mostly linked to women – such as being caring, helpful and gentle – whereas the agentic virtues are mostly linked to men – such as being assertive and powerful (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Some research advises that women should display different leadership styles when compared to men when they occupy leadership positions. In the existing literature, a meta-analysis study by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007) on transformational and transactional leadership showed that female leaders were inclined towards transformational leadership when it came to supporting and encouraging a colleague, whereas men were slightly more inclined towards transactional leadership. Likewise, Javidan et al. (2016) conducted a survey with 1,187 managers, representing 74 countries around the globe, to detect the gender differences in universal leadership. Their findings demonstrated that there is a substantial

difference in the way men and women function as leaders globally. Also, they established that women have a stronger desire for diversity, diplomacy and intercultural sympathy in global leadership, whereas men have a stronger desire for business practicality, a cosmopolitan attitude and an interactive impact.

In contrast, other researchers have argued that there are no substantial gender differences between male and female leadership styles. Oshagbemi and Gill (2003) examination of the leadership styles and behaviours of UK managers concluded that there are no statistical differences between men and women in terms of their directive, consultative and participative leadership styles. The only difference they found was that women delegate fewer tasks than their male counterparts. There were more similarities found in their research than differences about men's and women's leadership styles. Similarly, Noor et al. (2011) investigation on gender, differences in leadership styles and emotional intelligence reported that there were no significant differences between the transactional and transformational leadership styles. However, the authors advocated that although women are comparatively analogous to men in terms of their effectiveness, women leaders tend to be more participative and less autocratic. Despite this, stereotypical masculine behaviours are still considered to be important for leadership. Shanmugam et al. (2007) declared that if the sexes are seen so differently in organisations, then leadership styles are likely to be perceived differently; therefore, they suggested the need for women to be coached to the same level as men. Moreover, Shanmugam et al. (2007) emphasised that modern leaders should be androgynous, i.e., one should be able to combine both masculine and feminine leadership styles regardless of one's biological gender.

## 3.4 Women in Leadership

Around the 18th century, women worked inside the home more than outside. This pattern remained stable until 1940; however, the Second World War years were characterised by a huge change in women's employment after women started doing the jobs left empty by servicemen (Brooke 2006). Powell and Graves (2003) also confirm that women's labour participation has increased since 1940 and that women's involvement in senior roles has been increasing since 2000. Similarly, a recent report by ILO (2018) also verifies this fact: women's employment percentage increased to 48.5% in 2018. Although the traditional concept of leadership started with masculine representation and considered men as leaders, it has transformed over time (Eagly & Carli, 2007). There are various behaviours (such as

transformational and transactional leadership) associated with leadership and these reflect various characteristics (Hentschel et al., 2019). Female leadership is considered as one part of the leadership concept and is defined in several ways. Bagilhole and White (2013) and Broughton and Miller (2009) defined with an argument that women are leaders and they can lead. Hentschel (2019) related it to special characteristics and attributes (such as caring for others and building relationships), which are valued in today's organisations, whereas Due Billing and Alvesson (2000) believed that leadership should not be segregated into gender-based leadership.

The concept of women being effective leaders has been gaining traction since 1990, the year that two researchers investigated women's styles of leadership. In 1990, Sally Helgesen published a book that examined women's styles of leadership in comparison with those of men based on Mintzberg's 1968 revolutionary study of men as leaders. It highlighted the importance of the social dimension, soft skills and an inclusive approach for women. This study was significant in emphasising the value of women and the merits of having women in the workplace. Most importantly, her study validated women's way of doing things. While this research was of great importance, it was limited to only four participants (women executives in different business sectors in America). However, this study served as a platform for enhanced research into women's leadership styles around the globe. In addition, Professor Judy Rosener (1990) published a study called "Ways Women Lead", which examined female leadership styles. Based on James's leadership theories (i.e., transactional and transformational), she established that men are more likely to view leadership as transactional by applying power and authority, whereas women are more transformational about motivating and encouraging others. Furthermore, she also claimed that interactive leadership is advantageous after verifying this fact with reference to successful women who participated in her study. There have also been various discussions around the advantages of having women as leaders and the impact of this on organisational performance and gender diversity (Girdauskiene & Eyvazzade, 2015; Zenger & Folkman, 2019). The positive outcome of having women in decision-making roles has been evidenced by various researchers, which is discussed in the section.

### 3.4.1 Advantages of female leadership

Historically, women have been underrepresented in leadership positions across the globe in both private and public organisations. Gender discrimination and gender inequality remain

significant challenges for women across a broad spectrum of jobs, and specifically for women who are determined to take up leadership positions. Burkinshaw and White (2017) and Girdauskiene and Eyvazzade (2015) have suggested the advantages of having female leaders on board: they may bring unique attitudes, traits and behaviours to their work. However, gaining these advantages requires organisations to tackle the various barriers obstructing women, such as unfair selection and promotion, gender discrimination and unfair performance reviews (Offermann & Foley, 2020).

Caprino (2013) claimed that the major organisations and people in leadership positions have not fully understood the importance of having women in key positions. A study conducted by McKinsey & Company (2007), based on high-performing organisations, discovered that there was a correlation between the organisation's performance and the number of women in management. While there were no precise conclusions made, except providing a snapshot in favour of gender equality, some feedback and comments were provided by the participants. This included an acknowledgement of the fact that having women as board members changes the level of interaction and results in more ideas. Similarly, although the Catalyst (2011) report did not establish any causal connections, it affirmed the advantages of gender diversity by demonstrating that Fortune 500 companies with a majority of women on their board of directors had outperformed, with at least 16% profit on sales and at least 26% return on capital investment than companies with a lower representation of women. Having women in leadership roles not only benefits the performance of an organisation; it also promotes diversity and positivity within the organisation. A study by Javidan et al. (2016) concluded, after surveying to detect gender differences in universal leadership with 1,187 managers representing 74 countries around the globe, [found] that women were stronger in their desire for diversity, diplomacy and intercultural sympathy in global leadership, whereas men were strong about business practicality, cosmopolitan attitudes and their interactive impact. Therefore, they recommended that leadership needs to be shared between men and women to achieve success.

Girdauskiene and Eyvazzade (2015) described female leaders as motivational leaders with a caring and rewarding nature that inspires people to perform better. This was also discovered in Zenger and Folkman's (2019) report, which found that women outscored men in 17 out of 19 of the capabilities of leadership. Amongst them, building relationships, collaboration and teamwork were the capabilities that women rated higher in than men. This shows that women

are considered to be effective leaders with a rewarding nature and good collaboration skills. Nohria and Khurana (2010) reported that having women in senior roles and listening to their voices in decision making helps in generating diversity and quality. In the same vein, Dezso and Ross's (2011) investigation also concluded that having women in senior positions promotes diversity and increases firm performance: they confirmed that companies with a minimum of one woman as a board member performed at least one percent more efficiently than companies with no women on the board. Furthermore, Dezso and Ross (2011) asserted that having women in senior roles not only benefits the women themselves; it also brings diversity advantages to the upper management team. Similarly, Burkinshaw (2015) also identified that an increase in the number of women in top positions increases social justice, gender equality, leadership quality and business growth. This confirms that women's involvement in executive positions helps not only in improving financial progress but also in enhancing productivity. Thus, it can be reasoned that gender inclusivity fosters positivity towards the organisation and motivation for employees (Atcheson, 2018).

The value of representation in the higher education sector is of greater importance in shaping the prospects of society; therefore, it is imperative to have a diversely represented educational system. The inclusion of women in senior roles within higher education promotes social and cultural transformation for women (David, 2015). The traditional concept of universities as a boys' club (Zhao & Jones, 2017) and the existence of a masculine culture can be improved with gender equality and diversity (Potvin et al., 2018). Moreover, women in leadership positions also serve as role models for aspiring female leaders (Burkinshaw, 2015), while also promoting a positive attitude towards the job and encouraging more women into higher education roles. Cottrol et al. (2003) also claimed that as the populations of students taking higher education studies become more diverse, leadership should also reflect this range of diversity, as emphasising the effects of diversity in the leadership positions of universities echoes the benefits of diversity in students. While education is considered a gateway to opportunities, students might be doubtful about this if they cannot see themselves reflected in leadership positions (Okinyi et al., 2015).

Margaret Spellings, the former Secretary of Education (USA), also stressed the importance of diversity and its effect on the approachability of education. She claimed that the students who observe diversity at the management level of higher education may be encouraged to pursue further education, whereas students who do not see individuals like themselves in higher roles

may sense that there are barriers to their presence in those positions of academia McClure (2007). Similarly, Longman (2018) asserted that women in higher education leadership roles act as an important measure by which to increase access for women into higher education as well as girls' rates of school completion.

General stereotypes that create barriers for women in the workforce must still be tackled to allow women with positive capabilities and qualities to take up leadership roles in an organisation (Offermann & Foley, 2020). Whereas, Lammers and Gast (2017, p. 29) argue that communicating the "advantage of female leadership lowers that [being selected] likelihood", as overstated and stereotypical assertions about female leadership skills and relating them to claims that women are taking over, reduces people's support for the positive actions that are aimed at decreasing gender disparity in leadership.

Although, there is substantial evidence indicating the advantages of the inclusion of women in senior positions of the organisation, unfortunately, most studies discovery on female inclusion advantages are unable to communicate why these effects are found. Assumptions range from the concept that women as traditional outsiders bring new perceptions, to the impression that women can make distinctive contributions in terms of leadership style and behaviour. However, it is clear that making leadership roles equally accessible to men and women attracts the wider talent pool to the organisations. As women are increasingly making up a larger percentage of a company's executive talent, failing to accept them for senior positions can turn out to be particularly limiting. To explore the situation of women's representation globally, the literature on women's leadership in various settings are studied below.

### 3.4.2 Women's under-representation in leadership positions globally

Even though women's engagement as leaders has been considered advantageous, the representation of women in leadership positions is still substantially low. Even though the state of things seems to be somewhat improving as women slowly enter the realm of leadership, the process seems to be very slow (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). This problem appears to be a global issue, and it includes even Western countries with advanced cultures and practises (Davies, 2011; Muna & Mansour, 2009; Ho, 2015). But, the position in the Western context is thought to be slightly more satisfactory in comparison to the African, Middle Eastern and Asian contexts.

Fairchild (2015) reported that only 25 companies in the Fortune 500 are managed by women. Likewise, Catalyst's (2018) data showed that despite the fact that almost half (46.9%) of the country's (US) labour population is made up of women, only 23% of the senior roles are occupied by women. On a comforting note, 69% of US businesses had at least one woman in a senior management role in 2017. However, it is disappointing to see that 31% of businesses had no women in senior positions (Catalyst, 2018). An analysis of women leaders' status in the business and political sectors globally by Goryunova et al. (2017) disclosed that women occupy 22.7% of parliamentary positions, while only 9% of women are CEOs. Scott (2018) emphasised that the absence of women from major leadership roles has a negative effect on institutions and communities.

However, a report by Catalyst (2016) mentioned that countries such as Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Iceland, Germany and Sweden have implemented proposals to tackle gender stereotyping through educational programs that encourage women to enter male-dominated professions. Meanwhile, in the UK, 208 women MPs (32%) were elected to the House of Commons in the 2017 General Election, making it the highest number on record, while, with 206 peers in the House of Lords, women occupy 26% of the available seats (Apostolova, 2017). As per the statistics from 2018, women occupied six cabinet roles, including that of Prime Minister, out of 23 cabinet positions (Keen & Cracknell, 2018). Given that the UK is a country with a queen, one might easily adopt the belief that the UK supports and encourages women; however, the figures disprove that belief.

In contrast, Norway is a country that has high levels of gender equality, with 46.7% of women in senior management positions (Kunz, 2020). The same report also states that France, Sweden and Italy have displayed a positive trend in terms of increasing percentages of women in senior roles, with rates of 34%, 33.6%and 30.8% for the respective countries in 2015. This notable rise in the number of women in senior roles motivates other women to enter into leadership. Davies (2011, p. 13) claimed that an increase in the percentage of women as board members helps in raising the proportion of women directors and "thereby avoid[s] any kind of government intervention in the form of legislation". Aside from the accomplishments of a few women who have moved into leadership positions, women continue to battle for recognition. Warner (2014) claimed that with the current rate of progress, it will take until 2085 for women to achieve equality with men in leadership roles.

Women's representation in leadership positions is significantly low in Arabic countries. The religious, social and cultural situation prevents women from even reaching the labour market (AlWahaibi, 2017). According to the latest Gender gap report (2018), Arabic countries rank the lowest when it comes to gender equality. Many Arabic countries, such as Yemen, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Iraq, lie in the top 10 worst countries for gender partiality. This figure confirms the real struggle faced by Arabic women who are seeking equality. There have been many discussions about women's position in Islamic culture. The viewpoints as to whether Islam supports women or harms their development have proved controversial. Lord and Preston (2009) and Neal et al. (2005) are positive about Islamic culture, claiming that Islam promotes women's rights by supporting women's right to education, their right to work and their right to select their partner. Neal et al. (2005) mentioned that women can exercise their right to accept various jobs and roles if they have fulfilled their primary role in the family. On the other hand, Sidani (2005) and Khimish (2014) have criticised Islam for imposing restrictions on women and have reasoned that Islamic law does not provide guidance on gender equality. Sidani (2005, p. 508) argued that "the strict religious understanding given by some scholars, in such countries as Saudi Arabia, could be understood as an unconscious attempt to provide a religious justification for various cultural norms and practices". Furthermore, Khimish (2014) also emphasised that recent religious movements and women's criticism of the strict culture have led to questions about the status of women in Arabic countries. Several studies focused on the Arabic context have highlighted the issue of the gender gap (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; AlWahaibi, 2017; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Abalkhail, 2017). While studies are being conducted, stories are being told and issues are being discussed, with potential strategies – such as equal education, leadership development training for women, organisational support, etc. – being mentioned about overcoming the existing barriers (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017).

Women's involvement in the workforce has increased in some developing Asian countries in the past few years, but the number of women in leadership positions is still considered to be low. The booming Asian economy has surely generated numerous leadership opportunities; however, Asian women have not been able to embrace these opportunities and hence are still under-represented in major leadership positions (Yukongdi & Benson, 2005). The major problem about women's low representation is perhaps the failure to recruit and retain capable women. Due to the lack of promotion and motivation, talented and experienced women are leaving mid-career for a full-time focus on family or for careers in small businesses

(Broughton & Miller, 2009). This may have resulted in the loss of talented women from different organisations, on one side, and the hindering of female leadership, on the other. The problem extends beyond the limited representation of women in senior positions. The challenging area here is that if women are to be motivated to pursue higher positions, they must be organised and pipelined to fill these positions gradually (Stevenson & Orr, 2017).

Eagly and Carli (2007) claimed that women suffer considerably more than men when becoming leaders due to the perceptions of leadership that support masculine characteristics. Even if a woman manages to move into a senior role, she is required to be extraordinary to compete in a masculine world and succeed in her role (Cosimini, 2011). Additionally, female leaders must balance work and family life to prosper, and those who fail to achieve an appropriate balance will suffer from regret, discouragement, mental stress and impaired relationships (Muna & Mansour, 2009). Robinson (2015) also supports this analysis, asserting that women experience multiple difficulties while trying to prove themselves as capable leaders and their worth, and while trying to meet many expectations. Therefore, it is important to explore and highlight the difficulties responsible for women's under-representation. Besides, women's low representation is also seen in higher education leadership positions due to various factors which are discussed in the next section.

### 3.4.3 Women in higher education leadership positions globally

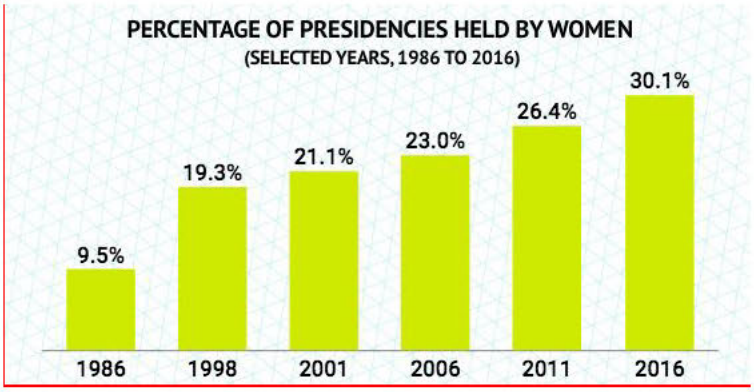
As discussed in previous sections, men have more opportunities to rise into prominent leadership roles, while only a few women have been able to break through the barriers and climb into leadership positions. This circumstance also holds in the context of the higher education sector. As O'Connor (2018, p. 1) opines, "formal positions of academic leadership in higher education remain concentrated in male hands". Studies conducted around the world confirm women's under-representation in leadership roles in higher education (for example, Burkinshaw, 2015; Morley and Crossouard, 2015; Zhao and Jones, 2017). Moreover, the worldwide data on comparable leadership representation within higher education is not available in a concise and organised manner. Airini et al. (2011) asserted that even though a few women have been successful in achieving leadership positions in universities, there is the problem of gender inequity amongst senior academics in many countries. This was also found by Sharma (2014), who mentioned that women's success in academic institutions is affected by gender stereotypes, even though more women are qualified and graduated.

Jarboe (2016) and Manfredi (2017) discussed women's lower levels of representation in higher education institutions in the UK. Jarboe's (2016) study revealed that the first female vice-chancellor of Oxford University was appointed in 2016: it took 800 years to break that rigid glass ceiling. In the same report, it was shown that 19% of all the higher education affiliated institutions are chaired by women, while 22% are women vice-chancellors. However, the most recent report by Jarboe (2019) revealed that 40% of higher education governing body members in the UK are women and 27% of governing bodies are led by a woman. This indicates that women are slowly progressing into leadership roles in the UK.

Whereas, A national study of Australian universities by Strachan et al.'s (2016) indicated that men and women have the same amount of representation until they reach the senior lecturer scale. According to the study, academic workforce figures from 2011 show that men's and women's employment rates at that of Level C senior lecturers are 23.5% and 22%, respectively. The gender gap increases significantly after Level C, with more men moving into Level D (associate professor) than women. The gap is more apparent at Level E (full professor): only 7% of women are in that position compared to 19% of men. Other studies also indicated similar disparately between the number of mid-level academic careers to the senior ranks, implying that this is a global trend (Hayward, 2017, Morley, 2014),.

In America, only 30.1% of university president positions are held by women (ACE, 2017). This figure is quite low in comparison to those for other fields of leadership. However, the graph below reflects the improvements in the percentage of women occupying university president roles since 1986: it suggests that there are substantial opportunities for aspiring future female leaders in higher education.

Figure 1: Percentage of Women in American College and University Presidencies




Source: Okolo (2017)

Similarly, in the Arabic context, strong cultural beliefs and norms have resulted in segregation between men and women (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). This has been proved as being disadvantageous for women from the early days of education onwards. In Saudi Arabia, there were separate universities for males and females in the past (Alwedinani, 2016). However, the establishment of female-only universities provided a chance for women to occupy senior roles. This created a balance between the percentage of males and females in higher education leadership roles. Alsubaie and Jones's (2017) study based on Saudi Arabian higher education indicated that one university director position, 12 vice president positions, 61 dean positions and 228 deputy dean positions are occupied by women. Although this figure is minimal, this achievement in female leadership in a traditionally male-dominated country cannot be rejected. Other Arabic countries such as Oman, Kuwait and Jordan also have lower rates of female leadership in higher education. Despite the lack of schools and colleges in Oman around 1970, it has now five private universities, along with government universities, at which both genders can enrol. Although the female adult literacy rate is 86.4% in Oman (AlWahaibi, 2017) this progress in education is not matched by women's progress in academic positions.

This situation is not different in Asia, where statistical data focused on gender in higher education is virtually absent, unless it is focused on student enrolment. This deficiency has been noted by researchers (e.g., Morley & Crossouard, 2015; Sharma, 2014) in their studies conducted within this territory; they claim that this absence of data displays a lack of interest in female leadership. This was further elaborated in Aiston and Yang's (2017, p. 263) study, "Absent Data, Absent Women", which discussed the fact that there is no data proves the lack

of women in key positions. Therefore, researchers advocated that the under-representation of women in senior positions within the higher education sector must be addressed, calling for more research beyond the Western academic context, emphasising that "it is key, however, to look beyond the Western academy" (p.263). Their argument included the fact that the assumptions should not be made about women's status all around the world based on the Western academy; therefore, more research should be conducted in other parts of the world to explore women's position and experiences within the higher education sector. Banker and Banker (2017) also discussed the difficulties in finding relevant data for their study based on female leaders in India's higher education institutions and further explained their approach, which involved collecting data using various formal and informal sources. Their findings show that among 810 higher education institutions, only 54 institutions have women in senior positions as deans, directors or vice-chancellors. In total, women only occupy as low as 6.67% of roles in higher education, compared to 89.51% of men. This finding confirms Aiston's claim that an absence of data means an absence of women.

As is the case in the other nations of Asia, the Ministry of Afghanistan holds no data on gender-based higher education management statistics. The data from Morley and Crossouard's (2015) study shows that the percentage of women academics in Afghanistan's higher education sector was 14.5% in 2014, whereas men outnumbered women at 85.5%. In terms of professional positions, 9.2% of women academics were assistant professors or above, while 90% of women were only teaching staff (Hayward, 2017). This demonstrates that women are mostly engaged as teaching staff, rather than in any other higher education positions. Nevertheless, women's representation should still be considered important, as women were only allowed into education after 2001; that is, after the end of the Taliban rule, which previously banned women from education. Hence, the number of women academics in 2001 was zero (Hayward, 2017). In his study "Gender Inequality in Education in Afghanistan: Access and Barriers", Shayan (2015) reported that a lack of opportunities to continue their education, as the result of several factors such as traditional cultural and social beliefs, corruption in the education system, harassment and a lack of female role models, has resulted in fewer women in the higher education sector.

Higher education in East Asia is very influential: its universities are climbing up in the world rankings – three universities in Japan and eight universities in Hong Kong are listed in the world's top fifty, while three universities in Mainland China are also in the global top fifty

(Awang-Hashim et al., 2016). However, this has not resolved the issue of gender disparity. Despite the differences in developments across the globe in various areas and in higher education, one aspect remains the same globally; that is, women's under-representation in the senior positions of higher education institutions. Although a higher percentage of women are entering academia, only a few women have been able to reach top leadership positions (Awang-Hashim et al., 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to address the issues in higher education that are holding women back from advancing. The next section will discuss the various approaches and theories used to understand women's representation.

Despite China having Asia-Pacific's highest percentage of women's labour force participation, women's labour force participation in the county has been declining since 1994. According to World Bank data (2019), women's labour participation rates were at their highest, 51.02%, in 1994, and they have been declining ever since: the lowest figure on record, of 47.9%, was recorded in 2018. This also impacts women's representation in leadership roles. A study by Wang and Kai (2015) suggested that among the 7,796 top university leaders at 1,166 Chinese universities, only one or two women are in leadership positions, while some universities do not even have one woman in leadership positions. The social and cultural aspects of China place men in a better position than women. Chinese society has been greatly influenced by the Three Obediences of Confucianism, wherein a woman is expected to obey her father before marriage, her husband after marriage and her son after becoming a widow (Zhao & Jones, 2017). Men are considered the pillar and backbone of the family. Likewise, the number of women in educational leadership roles is still low. China also has a poor record of gender statistics in its higher education sector, despite its student enrolment figures.

Another powerful economy, Japan – which has one of the world's best education systems, also lacks women in important roles in higher education. Women's representation in higher education remained as low as 14.1% in Japanese universities between 1996 and 2001 (Takano, 2005). This figure declined further in 2013, creating a wider gender gap in higher education, where only 12.7% of academics were female in the top universities in Japan (Grove, 2013). Despite having more women graduating than men, women are still under-represented in academic positions in the higher education (Guajardo, 2017). In Malaysia, even though women's representation in higher education is not excessive, it is still better when compared to other Asian countries. The education system is modern and more female

students are graduating than males. The country has five universities ranked in the world's top 10 and has 10 international universities, the third-highest number after Singapore and China (Unin, 2014).

Economic development and change in recent years have increased the female enrolment rate and literacy rate; however, this progress is not reflected in higher numbers of women obtaining higher education positions. Opportunities for women are limited despite the success women have accomplished in education. Morley and Crossouard (2015) urged that women's under-representation in higher education must first be evaluated by girls' or women's participation in education. Girls' education is still a big issue in several parts of Asia. In addition, women are discouraged from accepting paid work and it is preferred that they work at home as housewives; however, unpaid volunteer work is acceptable. This culture suggests that men do not want women to be earning or getting paid for work, as they do not wish to feel that they are being ruled by women.

## 3.5 Theoretical Perspectives

### 3.5.1 Social role theory

Social role theory proposes that "social perceiver's beliefs about social groups in their society derive from their experiences with group members in their typical social roles" (Koenig & Eagly, 2014, p. 371). The behaviours associated with these roles influence traits and characteristics that label men and women (Weyer, 2007). For example, women are considered homemakers, and they are believed to be emotional and sensitive to criticism (Hassan & Silong, 2008), whereas men are expected to be aggressive, bold and assertive (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Similarly, Eagly and Wood (2016) assert that social theory is a psychological theory that relates to similarities and dissimilarities in social behaviour based on the distribution of men and women in social roles.

As discussed earlier, gender role expectation is central to social role theory, which expects men and women to behave consistently with their gender stereotypes. As a result of stereotypical beliefs, men have been effective in achieving success in their work lives while women remain devalued (Maji, 2019). Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007) have also identified that women and men are tagged with different leadership characteristics: men are labelled as being communal and women as agentic when it comes to leadership styles. However, these characteristics are not simply related to gender, as both genders can adopt

these characteristics: Selart (2010) argued that leaders do not make decisions based on gender, but rather based on the situation and context.

One of the major arguments of social role theory is about the origin of feminine characteristics; that is, whether they are biological or culturally influenced (Mikkola, 2008). The concern is that labelling genders with feminine and masculine characteristics does not necessarily relate to someone being biologically male or female but rather being culturally and socially categorised as male or female. Vlassoff (2007) and Eagly and Karau (2002) have also argued about the essential view of gender echoing that social role derives from the role of men and women in the home and at work. Social perception has been considered fundamental to stereotypical gender characteristics (Hentschel et al., 2019). In addition, Matud (2004) argued that gender roles are socially influenced and that their patterns and rules do not have any validity. Cubillo and Brown (2003), Shah and Shah (2012), and Eagly and Sczesny (2009) believed that social theory can justify women's poor representation in leadership roles. The consequence of socialisation is that "men are brought up to believe women cannot lead them" (Sobehart, 2009, p. 53) and to consider women as inferior; as a result, men do not like to be led by women (Abalkhail, 2017; Zhao & Jones, 2017). Hence, women have to prove their worth by working harder to break such stereotypes linked to women's behaviour and performance, and particularly about managing expectations with regard to the domestic role.

Coleman (2009) also claimed that social role stereotypes are deeply rooted and that such beliefs still exist very strongly in societies that are patriarchal, thereby resulting in prejudices against women. Stereotypical gender leadership has been argued by feminist researchers (Kark, 2004; Vasavada, 2012; Doherty & Manfredi, 2010) to foster gender equity. Therefore, social role theory provides clarifications on the expectations that society holds towards women; this theory has been adopted to understand and explain the barriers against leadership progression barriers for Nepalese women.

### 3.5.2 Role congruity theory of prejudices towards women

Role congruity theory proposes that the observed incongruity between gender roles and leadership roles causes prejudices towards women as a result of: a) women being viewed less positively than men as prospective candidates for leadership positions, and b) assessing behaviour that evaluates the skills required for a leadership role less positively when they are exhibited by a woman (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The outcome of this causes negative attitudes

towards female leadership, and it makes it difficult for women to be leaders (Eagly, 2007). Therefore, role congruity theory highlights the connection between gender roles and their effect on other roles, especially leadership roles, and identifies the key factors that result in prejudices and prejudicial behaviours (Shortland, 2009).

The social role expects women to display communal characteristics such as kind, relationship-oriented, nurturing (Hassan & Silong, 2008), whereas men are supposed to be agentic, with a more assertive, strong and independent character than women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Given that agentic characteristics are aligned with the traditional definition of a leader (Lyness & Heilman, 2006), men are likely to be considered leaders more naturally than women (Eagly, 2007). Besides, Eagly and Carli's (2003) claimed that women suffer from disadvantages as a result of prejudiced evaluations of their capabilities as leaders, mainly in the male-dominated environment even though women have some leadership advantages. The masculine culture in organisations creates confusion for women who try to meet the norms exhibited by men while also following gender expectations; this has often been described as a double-blind condition by scholars (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Broughton & Miller, 2009). As a result, women often suffer dilemmas and are discouraged from attaining senior roles (Kolhatkar, 2017). Sometimes they are not even supported by women colleagues, as some women prefer men to be in positions of authority. Bassett (2009) also emphasises that it is not always the men, but also women, who hold negative stereotypes towards women; this may affect women's selection for senior positions. Eagly and Carli (2002) argued that societal expectations generate and uphold gender discrimination. Sobehart (2009) also supported their argument by asserting that gender role expectations and traditional norms for men and women result in prevailing inequity.

Role congruity theory has been widely adopted by researchers (e.g., Cosimini, 2011; Koenig, 2018; Elsesser & Lever, 2011; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Paunova, 2015) to analyse women's under-representation based on the incongruity between gender roles and work roles. When Elsesser and Lever (2011) used the role congruity framework, they found that the majority of participants had no gender preference about the gender of their boss however, those preferring men as a boss expressed negative attitudes towards women. The majority of such negative comments were related to leadership competence, which supports role congruity theory, and women's leadership abilities were subject to prejudice from many participants. As a result, Elsesser and Lever (2011) claimed that gender performance is still

evaluated based on conformity with gender expectations. Mendez and Busenbark (2015) have also argued that role congruity theory can also be related to men, as when engaged in certain leadership positions they may go against the expected agentic characteristics. However, women are more likely to experience prejudice than men, as social role expectations combine with role congruity to make matters worse (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thanks to these findings, it is evident that social role expectations and gender stereotyping create major barriers to female leadership development.

### 3.5.3 Feminist theory

Feminist theory values women's inner perspectives and has uncovered imbalanced power relationships at the individual, structural, communal and administrative levels (Fuller, 2015). Even though various studies have been conducted to understand gender differences (Mendez, 2015; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009) in leadership, a minimal amount of research has been devoted to understanding women's perspectives and experiences in leadership growth (Airini et al., 2011). There may be differences in the requirements for leadership development between the two genders, as women are less privileged in terms of them facing several more barriers than men. Hence, their development experience can be different. Therefore, the feminist theory provides the freedom to conduct in-depth research focusing on the gender (Burton & Weiner, 2016).

The feminist theory offers an understanding of the inequalities faced by women, with a focus on sexuality, power and progression (Whetmore, 2014). In addition, the feminist theory also helps in understanding women's issues, rights and interests (Crossman, 2019). Feminist theory is diverse; however, its shared emphasis is an analysis that aims to understand women's problems and offer solutions (Radtke, 2017). Hence, this study is in line with a broadly feminist ideology as it aims to understand and explore female leaders' experiences about gender stereotypes, social and cultural barriers, and prejudices.

Brown and Ismail (2019) stated that feminist theory provides a focus on women's oppression and provides a chance of understanding the needs of women. Likewise, Anderson (2000) also asserted that the principles of feminist inquiries are sensitive to underrepresented groups and foster greater awareness. Feminist scholars have contributed to women's identity development studies by understanding women's real experiences and addressing them with realistic implications (Burton & Weiner, 2016). There should be a correlation between gender

role theory and feminist theory, as mentioned above; gender role theory provides evidence with regard to gender inequality and helps feminist theory in analysing those inequalities.

As the result of several factors, such as societal, organisational and cultural factors, etc., female leaders perceive leadership differently from men regardless of their leadership skills and tenure in the position (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Therefore, it is important to explore the stories of female leaders, understand their work practices and examine their perspectives on leadership through their experiences. Lord and Preston (2009) have called for studies to investigate women's experiences, claiming that story sharing and feminist theory act as a survival kit for female leadership. The main motivation for exploring female leaders' experiences is to emphasise their knowledge and apply this to motivate aspiring female leaders (O'Neil et al., 2015). Even though it is considered that organisations are gender unbiased, Chesterman et al. (2005) argue that organisations are not gender-biased; rather, they are intensely entrenched in masculinity, therefore, researchers have emphasised the need for gender-based research using feminist theory.

Most leadership studies (e.g., AlWahaibi, 2017; Airini et al., 2011; Byerly, 2014) based on this perspective address gender discrimination and inequality and aim to explain these phenomena. Adopting a feminist perspective will help this study explore the experiences of women in Nepalese higher education.

### 3.5.4 The glass ceiling concept

Wirth (2009) cited that the glass ceiling refers to the false obstacles produced by attitudinal and executive prejudices that stop women from accessing senior positions. The concept of the glass ceiling was introduced in the 1980s, when partial hiring practices were observed in the corporate world in America; this attracted attention, and the metaphor of the glass ceiling was used to communicate and describe the reality of women's under-representation in leadership positions (Hindle, 2008). Later, the term was popularised by the Wall Street Journal in 1986 when it described the experiences of women in the corporate America (Carnes et al., 2008). The term was swiftly included in the wordlist of senior-level female business leaders after appearing in the journal (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

The glass ceiling has been a popular topic of management research (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016; Newman, 2016; Wilson, 2014). Even though the phenomenon seems to be decreasing (Mullins, 2013), as women now occupy more leadership positions, it has not been eliminated,

as women are still under-represented. Sahoo and Lenka (2016) highlighted that glass ceiling syndrome was evident in the lack of promotion opportunities, under-representation in leadership roles, sexism at work, differences in pay, the organisational environment, social and cultural impacts and negative gender stereotypes. Similarly, Subramaniam et al. (2016) also asserted that the challenges associated with glass ceiling syndrome can be also related to the personal challenges associated with demographic factors, roles within the family and family support, together with professional challenges – all of which can prevent women from progressing and attaining senior roles.

While several causes of the glass ceiling have been reported, women's experiences and women's competencies have been little investigated. Therefore, Gu (2015) argued that the barriers have been mainly discussed based on structural factors whereas the subjective factors such as experiences and skills remain unexplored. As the "objective structural position does not always match subjective awareness of such positions" (Gu, 2015, p. 130), how individuals experience and perceive the glass ceiling could be very different from how scholars define and measure this phenomenon. Thus, this research sets out to explore the individual experiences of Nepalese women by evaluating their competencies and experiences in the higher education sector in Nepal.

Soleymanpour Omran et al. (2015) stated that the glass ceiling is a form of inequality; they rationalised that women start to progress and develop exactly as men do after entering an organisation until they approach senior roles: here, men progress much faster while women's progress declines, with this slower pace causing inequality, which creates an invisible barrier, i.e., the glass ceiling. The existence of the glass ceiling was also validated by Johns (2013) and Wolfert et al. (2019), who reported that the majority of leadership positions are occupied by men, whereas women tend to move away from the usual pipeline or career route to leadership roles. Wolfert et al. (2019) stated that a lack of role models/mentorship, stereotype-based rational biases and a lack of organisational support were the reasons for the glass ceiling.

Abalkhail (2017) and Gupta (2018) reported that married women are more likely to experience the glass ceiling due to work and family life balance. On the contrary, Cohen et al. (2020, p. 29) study established that "married women in the industry are not more likely to perceive a glass ceiling than single women in the industry" and further claimed that married women are likely to attribute the lack of women in higher roles to women's lack of desire and

motivation. The reasoning for this outcome was described as resulting from the fact that women married to men tend to accept and adopt more male-oriented views of gender equality due to their attachment to their husbands. Although this is a noteworthy finding, marital status has been considered a moderator for social and organisational barriers (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). Due to the fact that married women face additional responsibilities of looking after other family members in comparison to single women, it can therefore be argued that married women are more likely to face barriers than single women.

In addition, Soleymanpour Omran et al. (2015)and Strachan et al. (2016) revealed that women experience the glass ceiling more as they climb into higher positions. However, Lyness and Heilman (2006), Gupta (2018) and Oge et al. (2014) claimed that the glass ceiling exists throughout women's careers by pointing out that women experience several barriers on the pathway to career progression. Consistent with that, Cohen et al. (2020) also indicated that higher-ranking women are less likely to report the glass ceiling than lower-ranking women. The next section will provide more insights into this argument.

### 3.5.5 The leadership labyrinth

Although the glass ceiling concept has been widely adopted, the idea has also been argued about by other researchers (for example: Eagly & Carli, 2007; Mcdonagh & Paris, 2012; Hancock et al., 2018). Eagly and Carli (2007) called the glass ceiling misleading and accompanied this with arguments that the glass ceiling: a) indicates that men and women have equal chances of progressing to entry- and mid-level positions, b) implies that there lies an absolute barrier at the specific higher positions in an organisation, c) fails to address the complexity and variety of challenges faced by women, d) ignores the strategies used by women to overcome the barriers and e) ignores the fact that the achievement of leadership is feasible for women. Therefore, to address all these issues, they proposed the use of the metaphor of a "labyrinth" to describe the barriers to female leadership. In contradiction to the notion of the glass ceiling, the leadership labyrinth advocates that the barriers to leadership development are not absolute anymore but rather that women experience a difficult journey while progressing towards senior positions (McDonagh & Paris, 2012). The path through the maze is not direct but filled with a variety of barriers, which can be predictable and unpredictable (Eagly & Carli, 2007). As all labyrinths have a feasible route to the centre, this metaphor implies that women's goals are reachable.

The leadership labyrinth concept has been applied in various settings. Mcdonagh and Paris's (2012) application of labyrinth theory established that factors such as lack of confidence, work-life balance, discrimination, stereotypes, lack of role models, aggressive competition, uninviting culture, etc., are part of the maze of obstacles hindering women's movement into leadership positions. Similarly, Hancock et al. (2018) also employed the labyrinth model to understand women's low representation in the sports industry and discovered that men had more chances of promotion and were paid higher salaries than women, thus supporting the existence of prejudice towards women as explained by Eagly and Carli (2007). Consistent with the above studies, Han et al.'s (2018) study identified difficulties such as work-life balance, lack of support, lack of networking and mentoring. Moreover, the same study found that women suffer gender discrimination from their early careers onwards, which creates a decreased desire to move into powerful positions.

The leadership labyrinth has also been applied in educational settings, which reported similar difficulties as in other sectors. Cselenszky (2012) found that balancing work and family life and gender stereotyping were the main obstacles to leadership. In addition, Byerly (2014) identified that women did not have a straightforward journey to leadership positions and rather faced several obstacles from the start of their journey, thus agreeing with the concept of the leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, one area of Byerly's (2014) findings disagreed with Eagly and Carli; this was the issue of family accountability, where participants reported that they had no issue in balancing family responsibilities and accepted that their husbands had been supportive when it came to balancing family responsibilities. Dubin (2019) also claimed that the glass ceiling has turned into a labyrinth, as women are facing challenges on the way to any leadership roles, and not just top positions. Based on leadership labyrinth theory, changes must take place in four core areas: culture, family, organisation and individual (Martin, 2007).

With regard to other theories, Acker (2012) and Akpinar-Sposito (2013) rationalised that the gender organisation system approach (GOS) provides a structure that explains women's inequality issues, which will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.5.6 The gender organisation system approach (GOS)

The other popular approach adopted in recent studies is the gender organisation system approach, which outlines that the low representation of women in leadership positions is the result of simultaneous interactions between the individual, organisation and society

(Yukongdi & Benson, 2005). Therefore, Omor and Davidson (2001) and Akpinar-Sposito (2013) contemplated the gender organisation system (GOS) as being a holistic approach for the study of the challenges related to the advancement of female leadership. The concept was initiated by Ellen A. Fagenson (1990) and reasons that women's behaviour at work and their inadequate career progression can be due to individual, organisational and societal factors. Furthermore, she claimed that to understand gender inequity, it is vital to recognise women's experiences in the workplace, how women are discriminated against in organisations and how society/the system treats women and differentiates them from men (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Cheung (1997) mentioned that it is not just the result of gender or the organisational structure but that both have an interactive effect. The organisations are part of societies with particular cultures, values and ideologies; hence, the gender organisation system approach also includes societal aspects that could potentially affect the organisational culture (Yukongdi & Benson, 2005).

Islam and Jantan (2017) argued that examining gender inequality is not just about identifying the obstacles hindering the advancement of female leadership but also about understanding organisations' structure and culture, which are major factors in women's discrimination in the workplace. Mensi-Klarbach (2014) claimed that a simplistic application, such as a gender-centred approach, has limited explanatory power; hence, a multidimensional and sophisticated approach, such as GOS, is required to increase the accuracy of the research. Likewise, Rowley and Yukongdi (2009) stated that the obstacles to women's career progression are not just within women but also due to other factors around them, such as the organisation's structure and its culture. According to Fagenson (1993), organisations and individuals cannot be understood separately from the society and culture they are rooted in. In addition, Yukongdi and Benson (2005) reasoned that individuals, organisations and society react in different ways in different environments; hence, women's development is different in different parts of the world. Likewise, Rowley and Yukongdi (2009) postulated three reasons for women's slow progress based on this perspective: women themselves are the first reason, organisational factors are the second reason and the third reason is society's and the family's impact on women.

The gender organisation system approach has been widely accepted by, Rowley and Yukongdi (2009), Mensi-Klarbach (2014), Yukongdi and Benson (2005) and Islam and Jantan (2017). To address women's under-representation issues around the globe and in

different sectors, a study was conducted by Singh and Vinnicombe (2004) with female directors with the aim of understanding the barriers to female directors' career advancement. Their study revealed barriers such as the lack of qualifications, and aggressive behaviours concerning organisational politics and family responsibilities. Likewise, Cross and Linehan (2006) researched to understand the reasons behind women's under-representation in senior management roles based on 20 females in management positions. The outcome of the study indicated that organisational policies, a lack of mentors, balancing work and family life and the lack of informal networking were the reasons why women did not progress in their careers. Similarly, Rowley and Yukongdi's (2009) study based on the same approach also indicated that women's responsibilities towards the family and negative perceptions of women were the major factors responsible for women's lack of progression.

The GOS framework will be adopted in the present study, as it provides an outline through which to examine in what way individual, organisational and societal factors hinder women from advancing into leadership roles. GOS framework will help us to understand the personal barriers relevant to female leaders' behaviour, their confidence levels, their commitment levels and their priorities based on their work and family life. It also helps in understanding how social perceptions and expectations impact the advancement of female leadership. Likewise, at the organisational level, this approach helps in understanding organisations' culture, their hiring and promotion policies and their impact on female leaders in the higher education sector in Nepal. An in-depth exploration is provided in the following sections.

## 3.6 Barriers for Women with Regard to Under-representation

There are several barriers that women have been confronting while climbing into senior positions. These problems have been recognised by researchers (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Mukolwe et al., 2016; Zhao & Jones, 2017; Gupta, 2018) through studies that have been conducted globally. The glass ceiling and leadership labyrinth have been popular metaphors used by Hancock et al. (2018), Soleymanpour Omran et al. (2015) and Strachan et al. (2016) when describing women's under-representation. Similarly, social role and role congruity theory provide validation of the difficulties women are facing based on social roles and role incongruity, while the gender organisation system approach provides a suitable framework for exploring and organising the barriers women face based on societal, personal and organisational issues.

### 3.6.1 Societal barriers

Social problems are related to the behaviours, activities, practices and policies that are strongly embedded in the culture and public policy (Burke et al., 2009). The under-representation of women in leadership roles has a strong connection with gender, leadership and society, since leadership is a socially bound practice (Dimmock & Walker, 2006). Consequently, the behaviours of men and women are shaped by culture and society, which view roles to be gender-specific, which in turn creates different opportunities for men and women (Eagly & Wood, 2012). This links to Hakim's (2003) claim that the majority of women are home-centred whereas men are more work-centred due to social role preferences. These social beliefs and social role expectations for the two genders have been validated by social role theory and have been shown to foster prejudice against women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Although women's participation in the labour force has increased in most countries, women are still expected to work inside the house more than outside the house (Abalkhail, 2017). Especially after the birth of a child, women are expected to work only part-time and to contribute more hours to the family, whereas men are expected to work full-time to support the family (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Similarly, Zhao and Jones (2017), Abalkhail (2017) and Huang and Aaltio (2014) also found that cultural and traditional beliefs are deeply embedded in society and that these provide men with the instinctive power of ruling the family and workforce.

The situation only gets harder when we focus on the Asian context (Zhao & Jones, 2017). Power and positions have been traditionally occupied by men in society, while women have been pushed back to lower status (Ibarra et al., 2013). The persistent social pressure and gender stereotyping have resulted in women's under-representation in leadership roles in many countries including South-Asian countries (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). A higher percentage of Asian women are engaged in family work and are looking after housework, whereas a man is considered to be the head of the family. Yukongdi and Benson (2005) reasoned that the cultural and social views of Asian countries are dominated by men, which justifies the view that men do not want women to rule them. Besides, women in Asia are under pressure to get married at a certain age (Allendorf et al., 2017), which adds more responsibility when they are at their prime age in their careers. This was also evident in Halim and Rivera's (2020) observations: their data showed that, on average, women in South Asia are getting married at the age of 20, whereas men marry at 25, and the majority of women perceive their responsibilities to be restricted to only household work and childcare.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Adhikary (2016) on Nepalese women employees to understand the barriers to career progression, it was revealed that in several cases, Nepalese women were left with no choice between career progression or family life, as marriage and motherhood are social obligations. Women are expected to get married while in the prime age of their career, and the family is viewed as being their main responsibility (Maji, 2019). Therefore, Adhikary (2016) argued that the traditional emphasis of society makes it difficult for women to advance in their careers. Additionally, Morley and Crossouard's (2015, p. 9) study of South Asian female leaders in higher education claimed that societies have a strong message; namely, that "women should not be in authority over men", which is considered a gender-appropriate behaviour. Shah and Shah (2012, p. 33) claimed that "women's participation in the public [sphere] and their access to senior leadership positions is defined by cultural and belief systems in a society". This was evident in a study by AlWahaibi (2017) where the participants specified that their freedom and access to leadership positions are controlled by the social and cultural expectancy that "women's place is in home" (p.191), while the community often attempted to guide them towards the achievement of positions that fit around the gender of community members.

The other barrier is partiality in education. Gender discrimination is also linked to unequal educational opportunities and education differences. (Verniers & Vala, 2018). Morley and Crossouard (2015) and Abalkhail (2017) and AlWahaibi (2017) tried to address the problem of gender bias being an echo of the bias in education. As education is a critical tool for social development that reflects the inequalities that exist in society, it can have a role to play in uplifting the oppressed and empowering the under-privileged, thereby contributing to creating a fair society (Abalkhail, 2017); therefore, it is very important to have equality in education. Lawson and Spours (2011) emphasised that gender relationships and fairness are more important in the educational sector than in other sectors as they impact the students' mindset and vision. Sharma (2014) reported that several higher education institutes and organisations around the globe are working to improve the enrolment rate of girls in higher education to bring about gender balance.

The other factor is the leadership qualities, which are considered to be masculine (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This generalisation has been the basis of widespread gender stereotyping (Hentschel et al., 2019). Firstly, women are perceived less positively than men in leadership roles as leadership ability is stereotypically linked to masculine traits. Secondly, women with

agentic behaviour are not appreciated as much as men with equivalent behaviour because those characteristics are less desirable in women's (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Therefore, women with communal qualities are accepted for female gender roles but not for leadership roles (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Even when women display agentic qualities, they fit in with the lead role but not with the female gender role (Rosette & Tost, 2010). Hence, it has been argued that for a woman to be a successful leader, she must find a balance between two characteristics. She must blend into leader roles along with female gender roles to avoid a backlash. Supporting this argument, Kark et al. (2012) stated that leaders with neutral qualities were highly rated for leadership effectiveness, while women who do not exhibit neutral characteristics are devalued more than men.

On the contrary, Koenig (2018) and Rudman and Phelan (2008) argued that women with agentic characteristics also face a backlash for displaying counterstereotype behaviour, as they are considered to be controlling and overassertive. To avoid a backlash and devaluation, Rudman and Phelan (2008) also suggested that women with agentic characteristics should consider communal characteristics. A review of the literature related to the under-representation of women in higher leadership positions around the world indicates that the congruity theory of prejudice, first introduced by Eagly and Karau (2002), provides a creditable illustration of this notion. For example, if there is a disagreement between leadership roles and narrow beliefs about women's behaviour, this can result in prejudiced decisions and actions being taken. This bias against female leadership could potentially prevent the advancement of women into leadership positions (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014). The next section discusses the barriers related to the organisational culture and policies and how these impact women's progression.

The various societal barriers reported in extant studies are listed in the table below.

Table 7: Societal Barriers Reported in Various Studies and Presented in the Literature

| Types of Barriers | Sources |
|---|---|
| Cultural barriers | Abalkhail (2017); Huang and Aaltio (2014); Zhao and Jones (2017) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Social role preference | Eagly and Sczesny (2009); Hakim (2000); Morley (2014); Eagly and Karau (2002) |
| Gender role expectation | Ga Choi (2006); Adhikary (2016); Yukongdi and Benson (2005); Morley and Crossouard (2015) |
| Gender stereotyping | Yukongdi and Benson (2005); Obers (2015) |

### 3.6.2 Organisational barriers

As per the gender organisation system approach, organisations are the other main area where women encounter various barriers. These could be linked to organisational policies, the recruitment and selection process, gender-based stereotypes, the organisational culture and gender dominance in certain positions. The effect of organisations' procedures and structures in influencing women's career development remains a prominent argument in many studies within the management (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011; Sharma, 2016). Despite ongoing efforts to increase gender diversity and equality, women are still under-represented in many leadership positions (White & Burkinshaw, 2019), which confirms that there are still difficulties that need to be addressed. O'Connor (2014) and Burkinshaw (2015) discussed the idea that organisational culture is a complicated managerial myth and practice that pushes women into lower hierarchical positions by favouring men in senior management positions. Similarly, Mullan and Harrison (2008) and Abalkhail (2017) have also argued that organisational norms and structures disadvantage women with regard to their career growth.

Burkinshaw and White (2017, p. 2) claimed that "organisational structure is not gender-neutral and organizational culture reflects the wishes and needs of powerful men". Traditionally, organisational structures have been based on the masculinity (Hearn & Collinson, 2018) and so are universities (Harley, 2003; O'Connor, 2014). Most senior positions are occupied by men who benefit from the existing definitions of outstanding leader and merit (O'Connor, 2014). Senior positions are gendered as male, which results in a masculine culture (Broughton & Miller, 2009), that favours homosocial networks (Fletcher et al., 2007), and appears unfriendly and discriminatory against women (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). It also results in fewer chances of promotion for women (Schwanke, 2013). These findings suggest that a masculine culture is a key source of other barriers that women encounter in a male-dominated working environment.

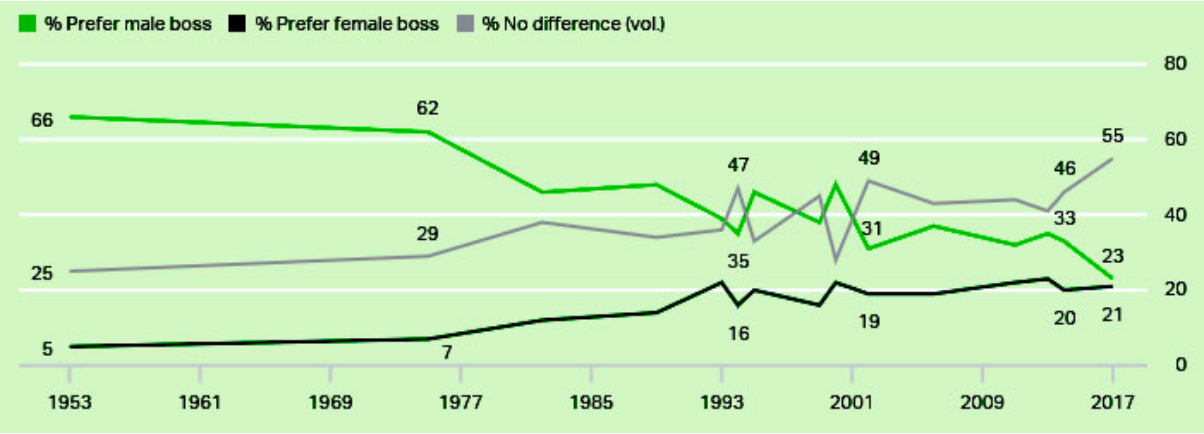
Judith (2018) established that women experience more discrimination once they reach the professor level. Her findings stated that universities are operated according to the male definition of merit, which often seems challenging for women; that the women disengage from the mission of progressing into senior positions and instead focus on research; that higher positions in universities are highly competitive; and that there is no space for caring responsibilities at university – therefore, those who are caring are disadvantaged when it comes to career progression. She also described the presence of gendered roles in such a way

that certain roles and responsibilities such as student support and teaching are considered to be better suited to women than men. This eventually creates an imbalance in representation in specific roles and departments, which impacts the women in the pipeline. Teelken et al. (2019) study reported that the move from associate professor to full professor was "the most difficult barrier amongst all the scientific disciplines": their findings hinted that the concern over the lack of women full professors ultimately created prejudices towards women due to unconscious gender preference. In addition, Santos and Dang Van Phu (2019, p. 18) claimed that women in lower ranks than professors are discriminated against by arguing that women spend more time on teaching and teaching-related activities, which have "a negative and statistically significant association with academic rank". This demonstrates the existence of barriers at various levels of academic careers and indicates that women have to navigate their way up from the very start.

Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2016) reported that the gender-stereotyped culture within the higher education sector influences daily practices, leading women to feel intimidated. They cited that twenty-three of their research participants were considering leaving the organisation due to male dominance. Moreover, the participants reported struggling to navigate their careers through the gendered environment at each career stage, from employment to retirement. Eagly and Sczesny (2009) stated that society's attitude about male and female characteristics has made matters worse. Men and women are allocated to roles based on what they usually do and what they are expected to do, as prescribed by gender-based roles (Zhao & Jones, 2017). This social stereotype is communicated from childhood and becomes embedded in their behaviours throughout their lives (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Therefore, socialisation is considered as being responsible for moulding ideas in children's brains about their roles in life and how they should behave as they grow into adulthood (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As a result, men grow up believing that they should lead the household, which is an attitude that follows them into their work (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Hence, these divisions prevent women from attaining equal power and positions as men (Manzi, 2019). This confirms that the cultural and societal system impacts the organisational practices, therefore in countries like Nepal, social and cultural systems differentiate men and women in terms of power, and its effect can be seen in the higher education sector.

The incongruity between gender and leadership roles is the other barrier that women are facing (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Drawing on role congruity theory, it has been shown that women are expected to behave in certain ways, which are found to be contradictory to the traditional leadership virtues, whereas the characteristics expected in men are congruent with the virtues associated with leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Newman et al., 2017). Hence, various studies (for example: Airini et al., 2011; Elsesser & Lever, 2011; Black et al., 2011) have claimed that men are more desired as managers compared to women. However, Brenan (2017) advocated that many people have no gender preference about choosing males as boss. Evidence from a Gallup poll (as shown in the figure below), which was gathered from responses to questions about whether people prefer to work for a male or female manager, shows that although people said they prefer a male (23%) over a female manager (21%), the most popular response was no preference, at 55%. This response represents a noticeable difference when compared to the same poll taken in 1953, where 62% preferred a male boss while only 5% preferred a female boss. This indicates that even though a male boss is still preferred, there has been a significant increase in the preference for a female boss and in the proportion of people who do not have a preference either way.

Figure 2: Preference for Male and Female Managers (Brenan, 2017)




This demonstrates that while men are still chosen as bosses over women, the trend of respondents having no preference seems to be increasing significantly, thus closing the gap in relation to gender preference. This rising trajectory (as shown in the figure above) can perhaps be considered evidence of a revolution in attitudes towards leadership.

Opposing the assertion that leadership is linked to masculine qualities (Acker, 2009), Cosimini (2011) claimed that the need for leadership has gradually transformed into a

feminine style of leadership with a preference for an engaging and participative approach. Based on this, if the traditional paradigm of leadership is gradually shifting from masculine to feminine qualities, it can be claimed that women should experience reduced prejudice. Likewise, Morley (2014) claimed that around the 1990s, gender discrimination was described as being endemic because of the built-in masculine structure of organisations. Three decades later, the situation is slightly different: it is now cultural norms that hinder women's careers and aspirations. Hence, Morley suggested that it was necessary to understand how women execute leadership differently from men, how this affects women's career progression and to identify efficient ways to help women develop their careers and leadership.

Another setback for women's leadership progression is the lack of transparency in the recruitment and selection process (White & Burkinshaw, 2019). Although diversity and equal opportunity policies have been implemented by universities to promote gender equality, transparency in the recruitment and selection process is essential to ensure the fair implementation of these policies (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017; Zhao & Jones, 2017). While Bouton (2015) rationalised that one major way that an organisation reflects its culture is through the selection and promotion of candidates, Coleman (2009) argued that organisations tend to appoint and promote those applicants who resemble the organisation in its current form, consequently, organisations with more men dominating senior roles have very low numbers of women in leadership positions (Mukolwe et al., 2016). Similarly, Acker (2009) confirmed that at the decision-making level, recruitment, selection and promotions are influenced by the image of what a successful manager is. As Yousaf and Schmiede (2017, p. 3) observe, "image is stereotypically masculine; the successful organisation and the successful leaders share many of the same characteristics, such as strength, aggressiveness, and competitiveness". Therefore, men are considered more competent than women due to stereotypical notions of power and authority (Orupabo, 2018), thus resulting in the selection of men over women for senior positions.

Grummell et al. (2009) and Shepherd (2017) viewed the masculine leadership model as being a cause of uneven representation in senior roles, with greater discrimination towards gender and ethnicity, particularly in the higher education sector. Shepherd's (2017) analysis found that despite external competition and selection from a wider pool of potential candidates, the result had not been greater diversity in terms of the people being selected; rather, men were predominantly viewed as being the safer and more experienced option. The outcome of her

analysis indicated the existence of homo-sociability in the selection process, which means picking people just like oneself. This analysis also echoes the principle selection process discussed by Blackmore et al. (2006) in the Australian and Irish educational leadership context. Similarly, Alsubaie and Jones (2017) claimed that homo-sociability restricts women's growth in relation to social and professional networking, which could be disadvantageous when applying for positions. Therefore, it can be argued that masculine stereotypical attitudes normalise the qualities essential for the recruitment and selection process (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Morley, 2014), thus creating difficulties for women while binding men together as they progress towards higher leadership achievements.

While the need for transparency in the recruitment and selection process has been stressed by many researchers (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Judith, 2018; Morley, 2014; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017; Zhao & Jones, 2017), van den Brink et al. (2010, p. 1478) argued that "some elements in the process of recruitment and selection are almost impossible to formalize or make transparent", reasoning that the academic arena is a political field and that micro-politics unavoidably impacts the attempt to "expose" gender practices. Furthermore, Shepherd (2017) has also suggested that micro-politics must be addressed in recruitment and selection to encourage women to apply for senior positions. However, Coleman (2009) reasoned that unfairness in the selection process can also be the result of organisational insecurities about losses that may occur if women require maternity leave and time off to look after their children. This was also investigated by Broughton and Miller (2009), who stated that hiring managers buy into stereotypes about women's place being the family and the home, which has been problematic for women. All these assumptions create a barrier for women with regard to their career goals and aspirations, which results in demotivation and disappointment when they consider applying for higher roles (Coleman, 2009). Mukolwe et al. (2016) reasoned that women are considered as being less tough than men, which causes bias in the selection process, whereas Geraldes et al. (2021) findings disapprove that women are less competitive than men claiming that the literature is not using the correct mechanism in understanding the competitive responsiveness. The laboratory experiment was used by Geraldes et al. (2021) to induce stereotype threat to women and men by calculating their incentives in a mixed-gender competition which does not observe women as less competitive than men.

Other barriers for women are male dominance and the existence of a boys' club. McAdam et al. (2019) stated that individuals with good networks are promoted faster and that women struggle to become part of good networks due to the existence of a boys' club in organisations; hence, women have fewer chances of being promoted (Schwanke, 2013). Likewise, Burkinshaw and White (2017) argued that the university environment operates with strict rules for university leaders, such as the language they use and about networking, which functions like a boys' club. These rules also apply in formal settings such as meetings, as Bagilhole and White (2013) claimed that men stand up and speak, implying a sense of trying to impress, whereas women prefer to sit down and consider the problem. The participants (women vice-chancellors) in Burkinshaw and White's (2017, p. 7) research also suggested that women try to fit in with that club by behaving in the same way that men do; they called it a "survival party". This is seen mainly in South Asian countries, where power, politics and networking are essential factors for climbing the organisational ladder (Ga Choi, 2006): men have an advantage over women as the social and cultural aspects favour men, through networking and power relationships, whereas women are pushed back (Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Huang & Aaltio, 2014). Likewise, Burkinshaw and White (2017) claimed that the gender power relationship in universities often holds women back despite the effort they expend to bring about their advancement. Also, in comparison to men, women have fewer possibilities of moving within an organisation (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). In addition, Longman (2018) argued that it is very challenging for a female academic to transition her way up the academic leader; therefore, a change in mindset and attitude towards women is required rather than just a higher rate of promotions for women.

Wirth (2009) stated that wage inequalities arise as a result of professional discrimination, which can be linked to the imbalance between paid work and voluntary care work. Ferrant et al. (2014) argued that even though women's labour participation has increased significantly, women are likely to engage in volunteer and unpaid work more than men. Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014) also reported that women from South Asian counties such as Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka are found to be engaged in "the most vulnerable employment conditions": in Western nations, women are involved in high-level work, whereas women in South Asia are more involved in agriculture. Fadhl (2019) claimed that it is important to understand that women spend most of their income on the family and household; therefore, when women's income increases, the whole family becomes more prosperous.

A lack of support is considered to be another barrier for women. Women have also been victimised for their lack of experience and risk-taking within organisations (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). The majority of learning takes place through the experience of exploring and discovering tasks, with an emphasis on learning from experience (Warnick et al., 2014). These kinds of experiential learning mainly take place within the organisation and consist of challenges, high-level work projects and different job responsibilities, which help workers to develop the experience that is required for the leadership development (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). However, the gender issue is problematic in accessing such opportunities to grow. Women are less likely to gain access to challenging work projects and are rarely given chances to undertake those assignments that pose more risk to the company (Ga Choi, 2006). Such high-risk projects provide chances for recognition and visibility when the project succeeds, which help when it comes to endorsing the individuals involved for leadership roles (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). The next section discusses the personal barriers that are causing obstacles to women's progression.

The organisational barriers reported in previous studies are listed in the table below.

Table 8: Organisational Barriers Reported in Various Studies and Presented in the Literature

| Types of Barriers | Sources |
|---|---|
| Masculine culture | Abalkhail (2017); Zhao and Jones (2017); Schwanke (2013); Hirayama and Fernando (2018); Burkinshaw (2015); O'Connor (2014); Bagihole et al. (2007); Mullan and Harrison (2008); Wiltson and Ross (2017); Grummell et al. (2009); Blackmore et al. (2006); Morley and Crossouard (2015) |
| Negative attitudes and lack of support | Eagly and Sczesny (2009); Morley (2014); Orupabo (2017); Yousaf and Schmiede (2017) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Politics and lack of power relationships | Lyness and Thompson (2000); Huang and Aaltio (2014); Burkinshaw and White (2017); Ga Choi (2006) |
| Salary gap | Wirth (2009); Fadhl (2019); Ferrant et al. (2014) |
| Biased selection and promotion | Bouton (2015); Coleman (2009); Mukolwe et al. (2015), Broughton and Miller (2009); Schwanke (2013); Yousaf and Schmiede (2017) |
| Work discrimination | Wirth (2009); Fadhl (2019); Ferrant et al. (2014); Warnick et al., (2014); Ga Choi (2006); Lyness and Thompson (2000) |
| Gender stereotyping | Burton and Weiner (2016); Growe and Montgomery (2000) |
| Boys' club and lack of networking | Lyness and Thompson (2000); Huang and Aaltio (2014); Fairchild (2015); Schwanke (2013); Zhao and Jones (2017) |

### 3.6.3 Personal barriers

Aside from external factors such as those that are societal and organisational, there are individual barriers that are impacting women's growth. Langford (2010) recognised that personal factors such as work expectations and career prospects, along with balancing work and family life, have been challenging for female leaders. Amongst the individual barriers, work-life balance has been discussed as a major barrier for women. Hoobler et al. (2011) were of the view that social role expectations are the main reason for women struggling to balance work and family life. As women are expected to fulfil their household chores, look after children and spend time with the rest of the family in addition to working outside the house (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016), this creates an extra burden for working-class professional women when it comes to meeting both their professional and personal life commitments (Ga

Choi, 2006). Women have to deal with multiple responsibilities, and this becomes challenging for many women (Zhao & Jones, 2017). Therefore, women's multiple responsibilities were the main reason identified by Perna (2005) and Risse (2018) for women purposely pursuing careers that have fewer working hours; that is, so they can find a balance between work and being a mother. Furthermore, Piterman (2008) also claimed that women with flexibility in their full-time work are more likely to get jobs, while retaining flexibility provides opportunities for women to occupy senior positions in an organisation. In the same vein, Risse (2018) also suggested a link between low flexibility and a lesser chance of promotion for women.

Bentley and Kyvik (2013) claimed that long working hours at universities and the extremely heavy workload have been challenging for both genders but marginally more so for female leaders. Moreover, the many job responsibilities of academic faculty members, which include teaching, research, advising and supervision, make it difficult to balance work and life (Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018). Hakim (2003) and Langford (2010) discovered that women academic leaders are starting to accept reduced working hours and are sacrificing work success to fulfil their household duties. However, Hakim (2006) argued that women's preferences for low-demanding jobs are for adaptive lifestyles. Similarly, Mazerolle and Eason (2016) also reasoned that the motive behind women selecting less demanding jobs is to create balance in family life. In addition, Toffoletti and Starr (2016) reasoned that there is often the misbelief that flexible hours for teaching and research obligations make work-life balance in higher education achievable. On the contrary, Wilton and Ross (2017) reported that flexibility at work is a positive thing, according to the participants in their study (women academics in higher education): they felt that flexible work hours and work from home advantage were supportive factors for women. The participants in Wilton and Ross's (2017, p. 80) study instead emphasised that the "cutthroat culture [...] is very competitive and not fostering successful family life".

While most of the work-life balance studies are focused on women (Brand et al., 2017; Lenka & Agarwal, 2015; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018; Shepherd, 2017; Zhao & Jones, 2017), Rehel and Baxter (2015) and Karkoulian et al. (2016) have argued that the work-life balance issue remains less focused on men. Doble and Supriya (2010) and Rehel and Baxter (2015) have suggested that men suffer a similar number of problems with regard to work-life balance as women. Also, Evans et al. (2013) claimed that societal expectations concerning men's careers

and their role within the family make work and family life more difficult. On the other hand, though men and women both strive to balance their professional and personal lives, (Aldoory et al., 2008), Maji (2019) and Mazerolle and Barrett (2018) debated that the struggle has been more prominent for women. Maji (2019) reasoned that the women who work outside the housework the same hours as their husbands and share equal financial status with their family; however, they often shoulder most of the responsibilities for domestic work and childcare.

Similarly, Adame et al. (2016) stated that women have more responsibilities as a result of motherhood, whereas men do not have to face the dilemma of motherhood (Mason, 2013). Therefore, women face more challenges in finding a balance between work and family life (Adame et al., 2016). Although several studies have recognised that work-life balance is not a gendered issue (Doble & Supriya, 2010; Karkoulian et al., 2016; Mazerolle & Barrett, 2018), Aldoory et al. (2008) study revealed that both genders of participants (men and women) in their study had the perception that work-life balance is a woman's issue. In addition, Mazerolle and Barrett (2018, p. 249) claimed that in higher education, "the pursuit of work-life balance appears to be a gendered issue" – one that centres only on women.

Burkinshaw (2015), Alsubaie and Jones (2017) and Johns (2013) highlighted the difference in levels of confidence and ambition between men and women, adding that the lack of self-confidence in women creates a major personal barrier that prevents women from moving into senior positions. Zenger and Folkman (2019) also postulated that women consider themselves to have less potential than men to enter leadership positions, while also suggesting that women should be confident and resilient to cope with prejudice. A few studies (for example: Chesterman et al., 2005; Johns, 2013) have also reported that women are reluctant to apply for senior positions, which has been linked to a lack of confidence and determination. Moreover, Yousaf and Schmiede (2017) stated that women lack the skills, interest and time to undertake serious jobs. In addition, Johns (2013) confirmed that men have better career prospects and higher levels of confidence, while women lag far behind men. Chesterman et al. (2005) and Gino et al. (2015) have claimed that women see professional power as being less desirable and overly demanding. A conflicting result has been suggested by Shepherd (2017): the women participants in her study found senior positions attractive and were ambitious about applying. Therefore, Shepherd (2017, p. 86) argued that "women's missing agency" can't be an acceptable justification for the persistent lacking of women at top of

higher education and instead claimed that aspiring women are being disadvantaged by a few organisational issues related to the recruitment and selection process.

O'Neil and Hopkins (2015, p. 1) stated that a lack of confidence can be seen in men too and argued that "painting all women with the broad brush of lacking in confidence" ignores the cultural, societal and organisational models that consider men as natural leaders and women as less than. Additionally, Guillen et al. (2015) and Thomson (2018) argued that women do feel as confident and determined about their leadership abilities as their male counterparts; therefore, the confidence gap is just a woman's inability to promote herself. Lindeman et al.'s (2018) experimental research concluded that women's fear of criticism is preventing them from engaging in self-promotion. Besides, Hewlett (2011) and Marcus (2015) claimed that women appear to lack sponsors who support them. Hewlett (2011) emphasised that women should look for sponsorship as it helps to boost up to 30% of the statistical benefit of high-profile job pay rise. Similarly, Marcus (2015) established that men are 46% more likely to have a sponsor than women and argued that there is a direct link between a lack of sponsorship prospects and the lack of women in leadership positions.

Studies of female leadership conducted by AlWahaibi (2017), Alsubaie and Jones (2017) and Carnes et al. (2008) have highlighted the lack of role models as the other problem for women's success. As more men are occupying senior roles in the majority of sectors, the ratio of women has always been low, thus, it can be a reason for the lack of role models for ambitious women. Alsubaie and Jones (2017) claimed that women need more role models in comparison to men and that minority women especially must have a role model or a group similar to them to look up to make them believe that success is possible. In the same vein, Lockwood (2006) also asserted that having a role model provides women with the reassurance that women like them can overcome barriers and achieve success. Ultimately, if women are not present in the senior positions of institutions, it becomes tough for other ambitious women to see themselves as being capable of being in a similar position or role (Airini et al., 2011). However, Newman (2016) stressed that there are also certain professions such as social work, nursing and care workers, etc. where women occupy the majority of senior roles, which positively influences women who consider themselves as being part of a minority group. Hence, women with successful careers can inspire other women through their stories of success (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). However, participants in McNaea and Vali's study (2015) claimed that women in senior roles were less supportive of women in junior

roles: only the minimum amount of time was allocated for mentoring and hardly any networking took place amongst them.

While education is considered a major competitive factor for job requirements in Asia, women still are facing inequality in education in comparison to men, which eliminates women from being potential candidates for job roles and limits them to only certain occupations (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). Strong cultural beliefs about not educating girls are unacceptable and have created a huge gap between the two genders in rural areas (Sheikh & Loney, 2018). In addition, the separation of male and female educational institutions in countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan has also created a boundary for women by creating a home-like space (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). This segregation between the two genders in education prevents females from networking, understanding male behaviour and communicating with males (Shah & Shah, 2012). Even though girls' and boys' enrolment percentages for primary education are balanced in the majority of Asian countries, the ratio slowly becomes imbalanced as the level of education increases. For example, in Nepal, although 52.8% of females are enrolled in bachelor's degree programmes (more than the percentage of male students), the figure drops to 48.7% at the MBA level and only 15% of females are enrolled in Ph.D. in comparison to 47.9% of males (Education, 2017). This shows that a higher percentage of males are graduating with higher-level degrees than women, which provides them with more prospects.

The various personal barriers reported in existing studies are shown in the table below.

Table 9: Personal Barriers Reported in Various Studies and Presented in the Literature

| Types of Barriers | Sources |
|---|---|
| Work-life balance | Mazerolle and Goodman (2013); Langford (2010); Wosnitza et al. (2018); Toffoletti and Starr (2016); Adam et al. (2016); Mazerolle and Eason (2016); Bentley and Kyvik (2013) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Lack of ambition and confidence | Burkinshaw (2015); Alsubaie and Jones (2017); Johns (2013); Chesterman et al. (2005) |
| Lack of interest and aspiration | Perna (2005); Institute of Leadership & Management (2011); Johns (2013); Gino et al. (2015); American College of Healthcare Report (2006) |
| Lack of flexibility | Risse (2018); Piterman (2008) |
| Lack of self-promotion | Marcus (2015); Hewlett (2011); Lindeman (2008); Guillen et al. (2015); Thomson (2018) |
| Lack of leadership competencies | Yousaf and Schmiede (2017); Burkinshaw (2015); Alsubaie and Jones (2017); Johns (2013); Chesterman et al. (2005); Perna (2005); Institute of Leadership & Management (2011); Johns (2013); Gino et al. (2015) |
| Lack of role models | McNaea and Vali (2015); AlWahaibi (2017); Alsubaie and Jones (2017); Carnes et al. (2008); Plas and Woodman (2014); Arini et al. (2011) |

In addition to barriers, the participants in various studies have reported on the strategies that they have used or found effective for women's progression. This is explored in the next section.

## 3.7 Strategies for Overcoming Barriers to Female Leadership

In addition to verifying the existence of barriers, various studies (Ely et al., 2011; Pheko, 2014; McLaughlin & Cox, 2016) have also focused on discovering the strategies used by successful female leaders, as these can provide direction for ambitious women. Pheko's (2014) study established that ambition, hard work and intelligence, along with networking, were emphasised as being a key part of leadership success by female leaders. Experts from McKinsey (2007), based on interviews with successful women executives, stated that for a woman to become a successful leader, she must possess a desire to lead and have qualities such as being open to change, collaboration and networking, and managing multiple responsibilities and risk-taking. Cubillo and Brown's (2003)study of successful women education leaders around the world found that women who displayed independent, self-confident and self-reliant qualities despite the male-dominated culture were able to break through obstacles. Consistent with that, Bass and Riggio (2006) and Coleman (2009) also found that women exhibited characteristics such as self-confidence, emotional intelligence and charisma to maximise their overall benefit. Similarly, Airini et al. (2011) and Scott (2018) found that the strategies of being a good team player, risk-taking, learning from mentors and willingness to grasp instant opportunities enabled women to develop strength in tackling challenges and succeeding in leadership roles. In addition, Redmond et al.'s (2017) study of women leaders at regional universities recommended additional strategies such as a proactive nature within the current position, aiming for future positions, engaging in self-development and career planning, on top of grabbing all the growth opportunities and adopting a "never give up" spirit, while embracing opportunities and risking failure in the process of seeking leadership and developing a profile and track record. Shahtalebia et al.'s (2011) study concluded that determination, faithfulness and the sensitivity of women towards their jobs were major success factors reported by their study's participants.

Networking is considered a key strategy for paving the way to succession. Although networking within an organisation is primarily of significance when looking for a job (Trond Petersen et al., 2000), Knight (2016) suggested that it should rather be continuous for success. Obers (2014) cited that networking enables individuals to gain support from the group, assists in problem-solving and increases the help and guidance available. Kanter (1977) mentioned that when a person reaches a senior position, fewer bureaucratic strategies apply, and networking becomes critical. Since women have very low levels of representation

in leadership roles and female leaders are small in number, Day (2000) suggested that female leaders should establish networks with men and not just with women. Wipp (2018) also suggested that mixed networking is better for women and men, as it provides both with greater perspective and the network can be advantageous. However, Ely et al. (2011) argued that women have less exposure to relationships and network development opportunities. To address this problem, participants in Cowper-Smith et al.'s (2017) study conveyed that men should be encouraged to support women and advised women to participate in the local organisation and social activities in fostering networking.

Besides, Elias (2018) identified that women tend to be more critical than supportive; therefore, she emphasised that women need to develop a positive way of thinking and support each other when it comes to development. Moreover, she also advised women to be active in in-person networking with both genders, instead of just using online networks such as LinkedIn, and to devote time to nurturing those relationships. The importance of networking was also highlighted by Harris et al. (2013), who mentioned that networking within institutions is important for research relationships, information sharing and learning purposes. However, McNaea and Valib (2015) presented evidence that more women were engaged in informal networking outside universities than formal networking. Although informal networking helped women to understand leadership, it was difficult to transfer what they had learned into university settings. Consequently, Wipp (2018) claimed that a lack of proper networking within the professional environment results in academic isolation for women who are looking to succeed. In addition, it can be postulated that initiating and maintaining informal and formal methods of networking is important for women when it comes to supporting and boosting female leadership. Stein (2016) suggested that women should establish connections, support each other's dreams, develop relationships and proactively reach out for opportunities if they wish to achieve success.

Salary negotiation is the other strategy that has been discussed as vital for closing the gender gap, therefore, Leibbrandt and List (2015) advised women to speak up about the salary gap. Using a natural field experiment with 2,500 job seekers, their report observed a range of salary negotiations and settlements in two different contexts. Firstly, where salary negotiation is not mentioned explicitly, it was found that men tend to negotiate more than women and settle for a higher wage. However, when the salary was explicitly mentioned as being negotiable, the difference disappeared completely. Hence, Leibbrandt and List (2015)

recommended that women should step ahead in salary negotiations to close the gender gap in pay. However, Silva and Galbraith (2018) established that when women did try to discuss their pay, they were less successful than men. Their study also established that women in higher positions tend to negotiate their salary, thus bridging the pay gap, whereas women in lower positions do not. Moreover, they also suggested that the best time to negotiate is at the time of being hired.

Training is considered as being another factor that is helpful when it comes to nurturing women's confidence and reducing stress levels (Hopkins et al., 2008). In the past, training was classroom-based, which is not ideal, as it often differs from the real-life work environment; hence, women should be given on-the-job training (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). In addition, 360-degree feedback can be used in getting performance evaluations from colleagues, supervisors and assessors, establishing the full ring of the appropriate views (Lloyd, 2009). This helps women in creating motivation and increases concentration on improving performance and the skill in question (Hopkins et al., 2008). Similarly, Hannum et al.'s (2015) study indicated that women considered leadership development programs as useful support for skills development, confidence enhancement and ongoing success; therefore, aspiring female leaders need to establish networks, take part in leadership experiences and join in leadership development programs.

Similarly, executive coaching has developed quickly over the years and has been proven to be helpful for women in building confidence, self-assurance and self-esteem. Losch et al. (2016) and Hopkins et al. (2008) claimed that coaching is an important strategy for personal development and claimed that taking part in coaching programmes helps by boosting confidence in developing one's career, provides support in new working environments and assists individuals in taking on new roles and responsibilities. Moreover, McLaughlin and Cox (2016) asserted that coaching enhances and transforms individual leaders' understanding, which results in benefits for them, their organisation and, ultimately, the society in which they operate. Therefore, Losch et al. (2016) claimed that coaching provides women with an opportunity to discover the techniques required for effective leadership development and to understand the roles of a leader; therefore, they suggested that women should consider coaching as a part of their development.

Likewise, mentoring is another aspect of leadership development that is considered to be vitally important in the career development (Dell, 2014). Mentoring provides individuals with

an opportunity to interact with their senior management associates, which helps in building sophisticated and tactical perceptions of the company (Day, 2000). However, there has been an argument about cross-gender and same-gender mentoring in the literature. Hopkins et al. (2008) suggested that women should get involved in cross-gender mentoring, reasoning that it helps them to understand the male perspective, while enhancing communication and networking and decreasing gender-related issues and promoting relationships. Likewise, Valerio and Sawyer (2016) also supported cross-gender mentoring, stating that receiving mentoring from senior men can help women to develop an advantage, increase career satisfaction and foster diversity and inclusion at work. However, Sosik and Godshalk (2000) argued that even though men, as a majority, may be perceived to have more power than women mentors, male mentors lack the experience of the barriers that women face during their advancement; therefore, career development mentoring provided by male mentors may not be useful for women if they have not faced the same barriers as women. Additionally, same-gender mentoring performs a role modelling function for women and promotes an understanding of how to overcome barriers (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000). Likewise, Dennehy and Dasgupta (2017) claimed that same-gender mentoring is an effective intervention that helps to increase women's confidence, motivation, sense of belonging and, ultimately, their retention. Additionally, Scott (2018) emphasised the importance of networking for establishing relationships and women becoming more noticeable in an organisation.

On the other hand, McNaea and Valib's (2015) study participants (female leaders) claimed that their influence as women leaders was enhanced by gaining higher education degrees: they stated that their qualifications helped to validate and legitimise them as leaders, and they disclosed that they felt a sense of power and authority within their organisation. Hopkins et al. (2008) argued that education aids women in progressing into senior positions. Similarly, Sheikh and Loney (2018) argued that education enhances individuals' knowledge and information, and also helps in critical thinking and proving one's capabilities as a potential candidate; hence, women need to be educated to a certain level to compete for leadership roles alongside men.

To survive in a male-dominated organisation, Onubogu (2007) suggested women to uphold partnerships with men. She highlighted the importance of working alongside men, which helps women to secure the necessary attitudes and changes in mindset that lead to power. This was also evident in the later study by Cowper-Smith et al. (2017). Moreover, Onubogu

(2007) also claimed that considering men as advocates for change, especially where women are not represented at the significant decision-making level, has been proven to be effective for the assurance and achievement of gender equality. Women exercise a more considerate form of leadership than men, which is reflected less favourably in masculine settings, such as universities, where a hardcore style of leadership is preferred (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010). In addition, Rhode (2003) discovered that women with strong and masculine leadership traits occupy more positions in leadership and are successful. In contrast, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007) claimed that women with masculine styles of leading are not rated highly and mentioned that women should display more participative and democratic styles of leadership while being less autocratic. Although both arguments provide strategies for overcoming barriers, the question of what will be relevant in the Nepalese higher education sector will be an interesting one to answer.

## 3.8 Theoretical Framework

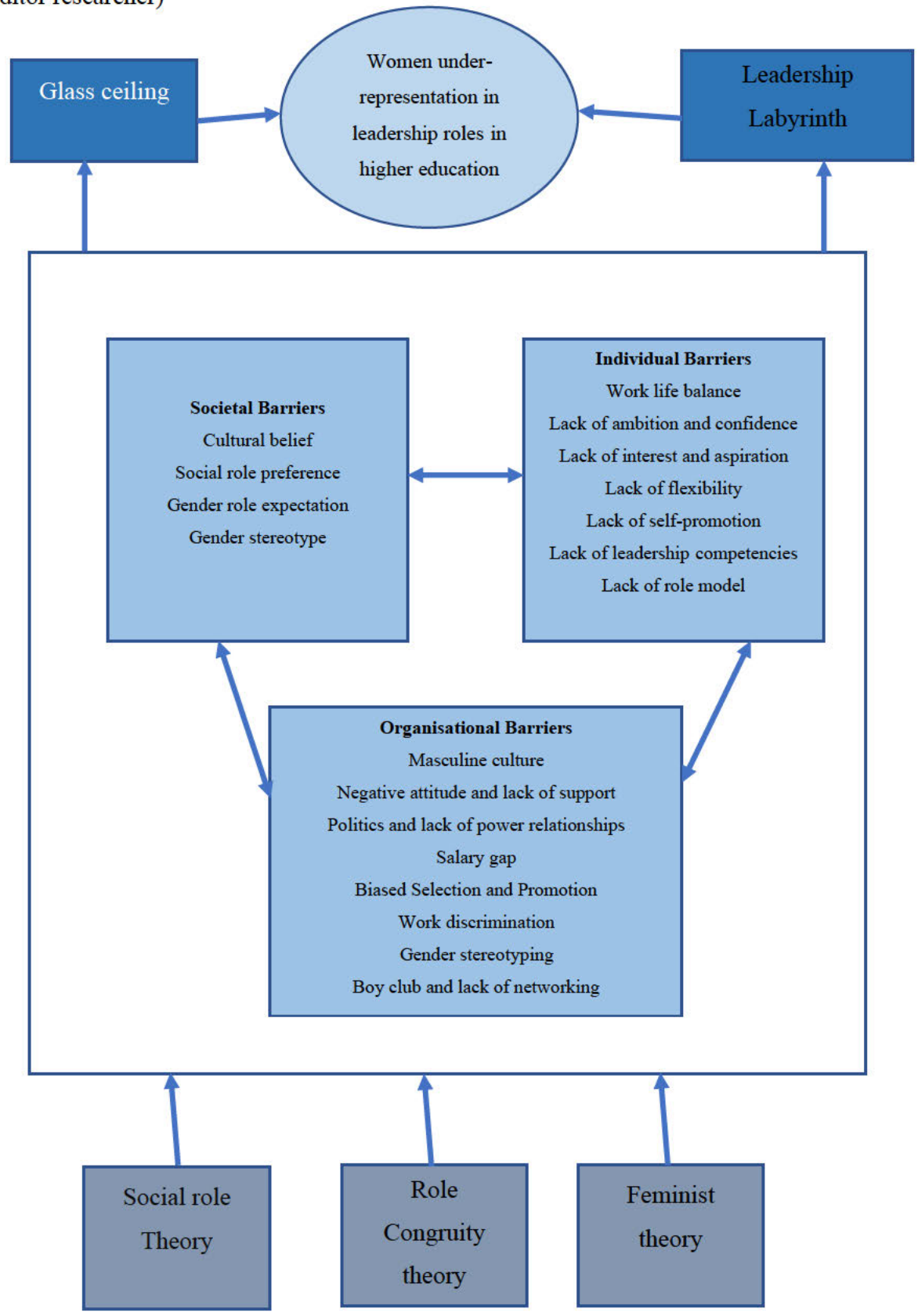
Various theories and streams of literature have provided a valuable framework for conceptualising the issues affecting Nepalese women regarding their under-representation in the country's higher education sector, which is the main focus of this study. Using the insights provided by these theories and the literature, the researcher established a framework for the phenomenon under study, which is summarised in figure 3 below. Social role theory, the role congruity theory and feminist theory were incorporated into this study to guide the route of questioning taken during the interviews and to identify problems regarding gender inequality in higher education. The three theories collectively suggested that gender-specific issues are responsible for women's under-representation in key positions. Therefore, a gender-focused framework is used to understand the barriers that Nepalese female leaders are experiencing.

Social role theory holds that gender dissimilarities occur as a consequence of social stereotypes regarding gender. These beliefs about gender roles – or stereotypes – form societal perceptions; these lead to expectations that men and women will behave in ways consistent with gender expectations (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Kacmar et al. (2010) argue that people adopt gender roles based on how society has defined them and that people tend to behave in ways that correspond to the societal expectations related to these roles. This has also resulted in women and men exhibiting leadership characteristics based on gender expectations: women are expected to display communal features, comprising nurturing,

warmth and kindness, while men are expected to be agentic, which includes competitive, assertive and achievement-oriented characteristics (Keck, 2019). Given that agentic characteristics are linked to the traditional view of leaders, men are considered more likely to be leaders than women. Therefore, the role congruity theory argues that the incongruity between the leadership role and gender roles produces negative attitudes towards women and women's leadership. These two theories provide important confirmation of the various barriers that women leaders face, while feminist theory helps us to understand the particular problems that women face. The main aim of this study is to understand the causes of women's under-representation in Nepalese higher education leadership positions and to shed light on the problems female leaders are facing; therefore, feminist theory is ideally suited to this study.

The theoretical framework shown below summarises the theory that guided this research and the issues of female under-representation in higher education leadership positions. The framework shows that social role theory, role congruity theory and feminist theory provide basis for this study and justification for barriers. Several barriers impacting women's under-representation in leadership roles were identified in the literature. The gender organisation system approach provides a framework within which the barriers that women face can be categorised under three major headings: societal, organisational and individual barriers. The literature on women's studies study suggests that there is an interaction between societal, organisational and individual barriers. It is conceptualised that these barriers are interdependent and may influence female under-representation in leadership, as indicated in Figure 3; however, this will be explored more in the findings regarding whether there are interdependencies between these barriers and their influence on women's under-representation in leadership roles. The literature also suggests that these barriers form a glass ceiling or leadership labyrinth for aspiring female leaders. Therefore, strategies are required if women are to smash the glass ceiling and manoeuvre their way through the labyrinth to progress into leadership positions. Therefore, this framework informs the present study by examining these general views of the theory to determine which ones (among them) are valid as far as female under-representation in higher education leadership in Nepal is concerned.

Figure 3: Theoretical framework for women's under-representation in leadership roles in higher education
(editor researcher)



## 3.9 Summary

This chapter has examined the literature on women's under-representation in leadership roles in line with the main research objective of the study. The literature indicates that women are under-represented in major leadership roles globally (Burkinshaw, 2015; Bagilhole & White, 2013; Abalkhail, 2017). This analysis has also discovered that the barriers to women's success in leadership roles are divided into three main factors, i.e., individual, organisational and societal. The literature has revealed that, to some degree, the individual factors related to women can be considered as being responsible for their under-representation in leadership positions. These include a lack of confidence, lack of ambition and paying more attention to family responsibilities than one's career (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Further exploration shows that women refuse to apply for leadership roles and instead prefer less demanding jobs (Mazerolle & Eason, 2016). The challenge associated with balancing various roles, i.e., work and family life, was also revealed to be a major barrier for females aspiring to attain leadership positions (Mazerolle & Goodman, 2013; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016; Adame et al., 2016; Wosnitza et al., 2018).

The organisational barriers responsible for women's under-representation include the existence of a masculine and boys' club culture (Burkinshaw, 2015; Bagilhole & White, 2013; Abalkhail, 2017; Hirayama & Fernando, 2018; O'Connor, 2014; Adhikary, 2016; Schwanke, 2013; Wilton & Ross, 2017). This has led to a lack of support, difficulties in networking, a salary gap and a biased promotion and selection process (Bouton, 2015; Broughton & Miller, 2009; Ferrant et al., 2014; Orupabo, 2017).

Politics and power are the other factors that are seen to be extremely prevalent in the Asian context, and these are impacting the higher education sector too (Morley & Crossouard, 2015; Ga Choi, 2006). Since there are only a few women in leadership roles, a lack of role models and mentors for aspiring women is proving damaging (AlWahaibi, 2017; Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Furthermore, negative attitudes towards female leaders and gender stereotyping have made it harder for female leaders to fight their way up in organisations with masculine cultures (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Warnick et al., 2014).

The final factor, i.e., societal factors, indicates that culture has a significant impact on female leaders' personal and professional lives (Abalkhail, 2017; Huang & Aaltio, 2014; Zhao & Jones, 2017). The social role expectations related to gender are rigid and create an

expectation that women should behave in certain ways and provide men with the power to lead (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Adhikary, 2016). The literature review further revealed that women are portrayed as wives and mothers, and are expected to be caring, while men are naturally considered leaders and are considered to possess the virtues associated with leadership (Eagly & Wood, 2016; Zhao & Jones, 2017). This affects women in many ways, from their strength to their professional performance. Hence, as mentioned by Yukongdi and Benson (2005) and Islam and Jantan (2017), personal, organisational and societal factors are interconnected with each other and create barriers to women's advancement in relation to leadership.

In addition to the findings discussed above, the literature review focused on the current theories related to women's under-representation in leadership roles. This study reviewed social role theory, role congruity theory, feminist theory, the glass ceiling and the leadership labyrinth. Social role theory and role congruity theory provides an understanding of women's under-representation in major leadership roles as being due to the social expectations related to gender and the roles associated with gender. Feminist theory provides a deeper understanding of women's leadership by examining their experiences. The glass ceiling and leadership labyrinth are famous metaphors used in describing the barriers faced by women. Finally, the gender organisation system approach supports all of the above theories and is the main approach that provides an outline for this research. This study seeks to gain an understanding of women's under-representation in leadership roles, which is the result of the intersection of individual, societal and organisational factors. A theoretical framework is presented at the end of the chapter which provides direction in exploring female under-representation in higher education leadership positions in Nepal.

This study will be conducted at two major universities in Nepal and their campuses. A qualitative approach is selected for this research, as this research strategy enables the researcher to understand the participants' opinions and their underlying relationships and motivations, therefore enabling a deeper perspective on the phenomenon (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This study will adopt an approach closely related to the interpretivist paradigm adopted in other leadership studies (Pheko, 2014). An interpretivist approach will permit the investigation of the participants' perceptions and social experiences by enabling the participants to reflect. Furthermore, since this research aims to gain an understanding of individual Nepalese women's interpretations of the world, as embodied in their reflections on

their experiences, this research strategy will also provide a deeper understanding of the challenges they face (Dudovskiy, 2016). The next chapter provides detailed information about the research approach and the method used for data collection.

# Chapter 4. Research Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

This study analyses the barriers faced by Nepalese female leaders in the higher education sector and evaluates the strategies adopted by them in order to overcome these leadership challenges. An in-depth examination of the obstacles faced while accessing higher education roles, the factors influencing leadership, the changes within female leaders themselves and the strategies adopted to overcome these barriers will be explored in this research. This study assesses the accomplishments of successful women with the aim of inspiring current and future female leaders in the Nepalese higher education sector.

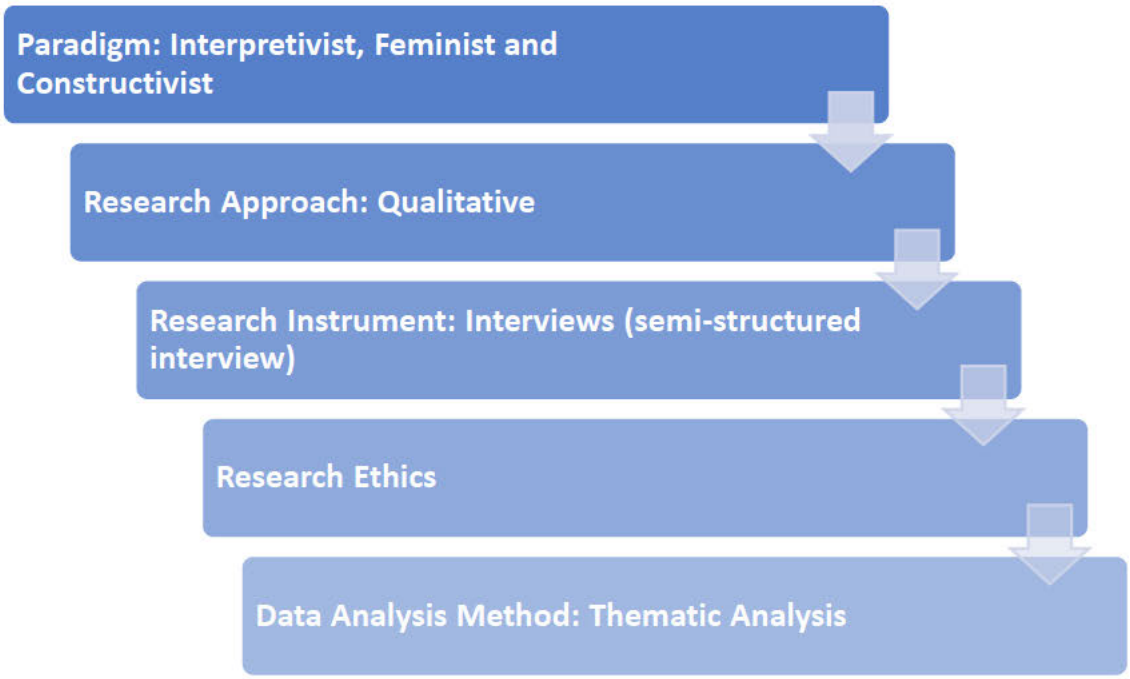
This chapter discusses the research methodology that led this study as it set out to achieve its research aims and objectives. This chapter discusses the ontology and epistemology underpinning this study, the fundamental theoretical perspectives that guide this research and the methodology. Similarly, this chapter reveals the reasoning behind the selection of Nepal as the country in which to conduct this study, the sampling technique and the data collection process. Furthermore, the data gathering process is explained in detail; it includes a discussion of the problems encountered during the data collection and pilot study, along with the advantages of being an insider researcher. The role of the researcher and research ethics are also discussed. The chapter also explains how data reliability and validity were achieved. The data analysis method and approach used for data presentation are discussed towards the end of the chapter. The methodological limitations are also detailed in this chapter.

The research methods aim at addressing the following questions:

1. What barriers are Nepalese women academic leaders encountering while progressing into senior roles?
2. What strategies are Nepalese women higher education leaders adopting in order to overcome leadership barriers?
3. How can women's access to leadership positions be enhanced in the higher education sector in Nepal?

The research approach is summarised in the figure below.

Figure 4: Methodological Framework Designed for the Current Study by the Researcher




## 4.2 Research Paradigm

Guba (1990, p. 18) mentioned that any paradigms simply indicate the informed and refined view that researchers develop about the way they have selected answers to three defining questions. He categorised the research paradigm based on three fundamental questions, which can be classified as: ontology – what is the nature of reality?; epistemology – how does the researcher comprehend something?; and methodology – how does the researcher go about discovering it? This is adopted in this study. Abdul Rehman and Alharthi (2016) opined that the research paradigm is the way of articulating beliefs about the nature of reality and the way of studying it. The key considerations and reflections underpinning this research are based on the interpretivist and qualitative analysis methodologies, which are elaborated on in the sections below.

### 4.2.1 Ontology

Interpretivists argue that it is impossible to view the world as an objective reality; rather, it must be comprehended through the subjective interpretation of human behaviour and experiences (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2011). The feelings, viewpoints and experiences of

the participants are considered as being of great value in an interpretive study (Frechette et al., 2020). In addition, by accepting this view of reality, this study confirms that social reality is based on reflection, interaction, interpretation and action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Frechette et al., 2020). Burton and Bartlett (2009) also supported this; they stressed that the interpretivist approach is the more natural form of data collection and that it includes comprehensive descriptions to give a sense of the environment.

Based on the interpretivist approach, this study believes that understanding female leadership barriers requires an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the participants and how they interpret the significant issues women are facing in relation to their under-representation in leadership positions. As cited by Gifford and Nilsson (2014), individual behaviour is influenced by societal factors, and as organisations operate in society, the main focus of this study is the behaviours and values of participants, which are defined by the context they live in. Therefore, a substantial number of issues that influence women's under-representation are based on social expectations, social norms and values, organisational cultures, power and political relationships and, ultimately, individual behaviour. Therefore, the interpretivist ontology permits the researcher to investigate all the phenomena that trigger women's low representation and to attempt to make a sense of these and interpret these factors in a meaningful way. The interpretivist ontology is also associated with the theories used in this research (i.e., social role theory, role congruity theory, feminist theory and the gender organisation system approach). In addition, Burkinshaw (2015) mentioned that the interpretivist ontological position acknowledges that the world of higher education is socially formed and complicated, and where complex phenomena such as leadership cultures are negotiated on an ongoing basis.

Ontology is about the essence of explored facts in the world: a researcher queries whether reality is external and objective, whether it is a social reality or whether it is mentally constructed and therefore subjective (Sikes, 2004). The former external and objective approach is a "realist" ontological belief, whereas the latter is a socially constructed and subjective method that is considered a "nominalist" belief (Amzat et al., 2015, p. 137). Ontologically, this study is conducted to gain an understanding of the social reality around the problems affecting women's under-representation in leadership positions in the Nepalese higher education sector. Therefore, the study could be defined as agreeing with the nominalist approach.

### 4.2.2 Epistemology

This study is underpinned by constructivist epistemology, which implies that individuals construct their own knowledge through the interaction of ideas, beliefs and the activities with which they come to contact to (Ultanir, 2012). This philosophy has been widely adopted in social studies as it incorporates the theme of social construction (Castro-Rea, 2016; Jung, 2019). Adopting a constructive ideology with a subjective approach in this research results in an inventive approach through which to understand the barriers that female leaders in the higher education sector in Nepal are facing. These barriers can only be discovered through interaction with individuals; that is, by knowing their feelings and learning about the situations they have been in. However, Wahl et al. (2016) argued that the leadership experience may be different from one person to another. For instance, the barriers faced by women business leaders may be different to those experienced by women educational leaders. In addition, the experiences faced by two female leaders in the same sector may also be different. Hence, it is crucial to first understand the personal experiences of leaders to develop an understanding of the barriers faced by women at a general level (Jones et al., 2018). Similar to the interpretivist approach, constructivism also stands against the idea of objective reality. Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that the epistemological position of constructivism is transactional and subjectivist. As the reality is constructed from participants' views and experiences, which is hard to quantify, therefore subjective analysis provides a better understanding of the phenomena (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Jung, 2019).

Likewise, as discussed in Chapter Two, the feminist perspective also provides lenses through which to understand women's challenges and explore solutions that can be applied to empower women. Hence, the feminist viewpoint is considered in this research in line with constructivism with the aim of inspiring further women-based research (Wyer et al., 2013). The main reason behind feminist research is to provide findings that are of equal value to women as men. Feminist research recognises the traditions through which women are dominated and are under-represented and endeavours to reform these practices so that these groups of women can be encouraged. Due Billing and Alvesson (2000) argued that biological variances should be overlooked to accomplish gender equality in action. This was also supported by (Anderson, 2000), who reasoned that there lies a difference between sex and gender. Gender is constructed by society because of sexual differences; that is, the difference in the norms, values, roles and meaning allocated to men and women. The feminist epistemology implies that the nature of reality is subjective and created through interactions.

The object of reality does not exist independently. Westmarland (2001) opined that feminist research is not only concerned with viewing social reality but that it also cares about changing women's lives. It may be the most popular approach for gender-based research. Most of the leadership studies (e.g., AlWahaibi, 2017; Airini et al., 2011; Byerly, 2014) based on this perspective aim to address gender discrimination and inequality and to explain the nature of such phenomena. Adopting the feminist perspective in this research helps the researcher to explore the circumstances of women in higher education in Nepal. In addition, it may help understand the leadership styles of women.

### 4.2.3 Research methodology

The main aim of the research methodology is to select the appropriate approach for meeting the research question and objectives. Debates often occur while selecting one approach over another. There is a general agreement that the factor that influences the decision to adopt a certain method depends on the research objective and paradigm selected for the research. For instance, quantitative research is widely adopted by objective researchers, where the statistical measurements justify the viewpoint more than the subjective exploration of numeric data. Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2002) emphasised that the quantitative approach is best incorporated in management research such as financial analysis, quantitative marketing and business economics, which are rooted in the philosophy of realism, whereas other areas such as marketing, organisational studies, management theories and leadership studies seem to be moving away from this philosophy. Bryman (2004) reasoned that even though some leadership studies have been conducted based on quantitative data, signals that change is underway can be seen concerning the methodologies used. He also said that the quantitative approach favours studies that are mainly laboratory- or questionnaire-based, which avoid any context-specific study. In addition, Flick (2009) argued that the majority of quantitative research considers surveys as vital and qualitative research as preliminary.

The other approach that is commonly accepted in research is the mixed method. Mason (2006) reasoned that the main logic behind a researcher's decision to use the mixed method is to either develop breadth (from the quantitative method) or depth (from the qualitative method) in their research. In either of these processes, one becomes dominant and the other becomes the embellishment. In addition, Ritchie et al. (2013) presented an argument based on major two challenges associated with the mixed method's validation criteria. The first one is against the ontological viewpoint, with an argument that there is no single reality that can be

established through multiple sources of information and that attempting to do so is ineffective. The second argument is about the epistemological ground, which states that mixed-method produce data of a different kind thus they are unlikely to generate perfectly consistent evidence.

Ritchie et al. (2013) highlighted the settings where: the qualitative method is needed as it is more important to understand the subjective matter before measuring it; likewise, for a newly developing social phenomenon where the existing knowledge is not described well, the qualitative method helps the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge. In addition, Ritchie et al. (2013) also cited that there are subjective areas that must be studied about the participants' knowledge and experiences. As, this study is set to explore the experiences of Nepalese women in higher education, this is best achieved through continuous interaction with the participants and by understanding their perceptions and behaviour, hence the qualitative approach is best suited for this research. Additionally, Alvesson (2002) and Fletcher (2004) claimed that greater consideration is required when it comes to examining the variables within the context related to leadership and, more specifically, gender-based leadership. However, the qualitative approach has also been questioned by positivists about its reliability and validity. However, Creswell (2013) and Denzin and Lincoln (2013) have debated and confirmed that there are settings where only the qualitative method is the suitable approach through which to answer the research questions.

As guided by the ontological and epistemological views, the qualitative approach is selected for this study. As this research is based on the nominalist belief, which considers reality as being subjective and mentally constructed, the qualitative approach is best suited for this study. The qualitative approach is adopted for this research with a feminine alignment and aims to resolve gender biases and explore the experiences and perspectives of female leaders in the higher education sector in Nepal. This research focuses on understanding women's journeys in leadership, the barriers they have encountered while progressing into leadership roles and the strategies they have adopted to overcome leadership challenges. These experiences and reflections are collected and reflected on through listening to, observing and understanding the participants. Hence, the qualitative approach is best suited to this research.

Historically, many researchers (e.g., Byerly, 2014; Shahtalebia et al., 2011; McNaea & Vali, 2015; Redmond et al., 2017; AlWahaibi, 2017; Burkinshaw, 2015) have adopted the qualitative approach in studies of women and female leadership, and they all argue that the

subjective approach is best used to understand social reality and women's perceptions, experiences and actions. As reasoned by Prasad and Prasad (2002), qualitative approaches are preeminent when trying to understand how participants construct the logic of their socially created world. Additionally, the aims and objectives of the research are exploratory, and it is difficult to achieve such aims and objectives by using the quantitative approach (Daniel, 2016). Besides, a qualitative approach also facilitates the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of the problems faced by women and helps the researcher to explore their strategies by interpreting their experiences and actions. Likewise, Denzin and Lincoln (2013) and Creswell (2013) also emphasised the ability of the qualitative approach in understanding the problem. Creswell (2013) further explained that the qualitative approach supports the researcher in addressing the meaning of individual problems ascribing to a social human problem through inquiry and data collection in a natural setting. Furthermore, he argued that understanding people's experiences through this approach goes beyond the statistics and explores the situation beyond them. There has been a significant increase over the past few years in researchers' preference for using the qualitative methodology while focusing on real-life problems (Burkinshaw, 2015). This study targets an in-depth exploration of the current state of women's under-representation in leadership roles within the context of the higher education sector in Nepal. This qualitative investigation thus can be perceived as a story of the personal journeys and experiences of women about leadership, which can be challenging while also being inspiring and stimulating (AlWahaibi, 2017).

In-depth interviews are adopted, which allows for greater examination of the experiences of female leaders (Patton & Fund, 2002). As suggested by Creswell (2013), in order to inspire individuals to share their stories and to hear their voices, a power relationship should be maintained. Following his suggestion, a sense of connection is maintained with the participants by building a rapport, giving them a chance to read the interview questions and also by providing feedback after the data analysis. Therefore, the qualitative approach supports the researcher by enabling them to understand the experiences of the participants through the inclusive examination of the topic being studied. As the nature of the research is exploratory, concerning female leaders' experiences of their research journey, the qualitative methodology helps to achieve this through interaction and discussion. Holloway and Wheeler (2002) also cited that a qualitative approach is well-suited to in-depth studies based on people's experiences, beliefs, behaviours and feelings. Teater (2015) mentioned that reality is constructed through a person's mind; therefore, the perceived reality is subjective. Thus, a

qualitative approach helps the researcher to gain an understanding of a leader's experiences, and this approach reflects their experiences and perspectives on leadership. The key questions about how the participants moved into leadership, the obstacles they faced during their professional development, the factors that influence leadership and the changes within themselves and in the external environment during their development can be answered through in-depth subjective interaction.

## 4.3 Location Selection and Research Sample

This study was conducted within major two universities in Nepal situated in the X and Y districts. These universities were selected for this research due to accessibility issues, the resources available and the percentage of female leadership roles. There is a lack of data about women in academic positions in many universities in Nepal, and data on women in leadership roles is almost impossible to find. The communication system is very traditional: in-person visits were required for every query made, the universities had poor-quality websites and no responses were received in response to emails sent. However, the two universities selected were more responsive to inquiries and were located in areas that were easily accessible; hence, they were selected for this research.

For qualitative research, there is no right formula to determine the appropriate sample size, which makes it important to select the right sample size to ensure the efficient collection of the data. A sample size of 12-20 participants was a typical number in the women's leadership research or the smaller number until the data salutation would be enough. The selection of the right sample size minimises the time of collecting data from a larger sample size. Reflecting Creswell's (2013) recommendations about the optimum level of participants required to reach saturation, a sample size of 10 to 20 female leaders in senior positions (head of the department and above) were identified as potential interviewees. However, only 12 female leaders agreed to take part in the interview process. These participants were identified through personal contacts, recommendations and networking. This method is often referred to as the purposive snowballing technique; it is widely used by researchers to access otherwise inaccessible participants (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). An initial period of two weeks of data collection time was utilised to establish contact with the potential candidates. Firstly, the information department of University X was visited to gather information about the total number of women in senior leadership positions and to gain an understanding of the process of contacting them. Two of the administrators in that department were very helpful and

provided details about some of the candidates in that university, including their mobile numbers. Some other candidates from University Y were contacted through personal networking. After that, all the potential candidates were contacted by telephone to book an appointment. Some of the participants were emailed with all the relevant information before confirming the interview date. In addition, after each interview, a connection was maintained with the women participants, which enhanced the researcher's ability to network and helped about arranging appointments. The interviews took place at various locations within two districts. All the participants were approached and selected based on their suitability for the research.

Most of the participants were in the 50 to 60 age group and just a few were under the age of 50. The data also shows that 11 out of the 12 women participants were qualified with a Ph.D. degree, while one had a master's degree. Nine of the female leaders obtained their educational qualifications in Nepal, two acquired theirs in India and one acquired hers in Australia. All the participants have a remarkable number of years of experience working in higher education, with the minimum being 19 years and the maximum being 42 years. This proves that female leaders are qualified to the standard level and highly experienced. All of the participants were highly qualified academics with publications in journals and books in their fields. They were all currently employed in middle and upper management roles as heads of departments and higher positions. In general, all the women participants in this study had earned faculty positions as lecturers, professors, associate professors and full professors. Most of the participants were married with at least one child, and two of the participants were widows. A colour scheme was assigned to each participant to allow for indexing. The participants' views are presented in the discussion section.

Table 10: Demographic Characteristics of the Women Participants

| Participant | Position | Age | Education | Years of experience | Marital status |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant A | HOD | 55 | Ph.D. | 33 years | Married; two children |
| Participant B | HOD | 55 | Masters | 20 years | Widow |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant C | Campus Chief | - | Ph.D. | 28 years | Married |
| Participant D | Assistant Dean | 51–55 | Ph.D. | 23 years | Widow; two children |
| Participant E | HOD | 60+ | Ph.D. | 33 years | Married |
| Participant F | HOD | 61 | Ph.D. | 42 years | Married; two children |
| Participant G | HOD | 42 | Ph.D. | 19 years | Married; two children |
| Participant H | HOD | 51–55 | Ph.D. | 30 years | Married; one child |
| Participant I | HOD | 59 | Ph.D. | 30 years | Married; two children |
| Participant J | HOD | 49 | Ph.D. | 22 years | Married; two children |
| Participant K | HOD | 52 | Ph.D. | 18–20 years | Married; three children |
| Participant L | Rector | 61 | Ph.D. | 36 years | Married; two children |

## 4.4 Pilot Study

Crossman (2019) outlined that a pilot study is a small analysis conducted to examine the research procedures, data collection strategy, participant recruitment strategies and other research techniques before the larger research project is conducted. A pilot study can also be considered a feasibility study, which evaluates the research approach, time, cost, effectiveness of the research method and adverse events. It is also an integral part of the research (Blessing & Chakrabarti, 2009). Crossman (2019) stated that a pilot study is

important for research in analysing the efficiency of the research method, identifying potential problems and making any modifications needed to the research tool(s) to improve the efficiency of the research and reduce the chances of unclear outcomes. Pilot interviews were utilised to revise the research questions, estimate the time required for each interview, identify the resources needed to conduct the interviews on a large scale and work out the potential cost involved. Moreover, early feedback received from the pilot study was also helpful in analysing how the interview process could be improved to secure a better result.

The participants for the pilot study were different to those in the central study. Pilot interviews were conducted with mid-level women academic staff who were selected based on their experience and their similarity with the research sample. A total of five participants out of 10 replied and agreed to take part in an interview. After the completion of the interview, the participants were asked to provide their feedback on the interview and to identify any areas that they felt could be improved. Although the pilot study was conducted in a structured way, it was not recorded due to the participants' voluntary involvement. The pilot study was also helpful in enhancing networking. The participants helped recommend and introduce the researcher to potential candidates for the research.

The participants in the pilot study suggested that clarifications could be made to a few questions, and these questions were refined based on their advice. The questionnaire was refined based on the suggestions made by the participants (see Appendix 3). Moreover, the pilot study was also helpful in relation to understanding the perspectives of the participants with regard to the questions and in calculating the time required for the interviews. Additionally, the findings from the pilot study were advantageous in relation to building relationships, getting more information from the participants and understanding participants' views while conducting the main study. The results of the pilot study were not included in the main findings.

## 4.5 Research Method

### 4.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

The mode of data collection and analysis is the essential part of the research method, and there are various mediums for collecting data; however, choosing the appropriate one makes the result more refined and data-rich (Dudovskiy, 2016). The ontological and epistemological position of this research is constructed according to the belief that people construct their own

way of viewing the world, which involves interactions, sharing and experiences. It is equally vital to adopt a method that will allow the researcher to interact with the participants, understand their experiences and interpret their individual experiences to meet the research aims and objectives (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Among the many potential methods, focus groups, case studies, interviews and participant observations are widely accepted and are the preferred methods for qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Byerly, 2014; Shahtalebia et al., 2011; McNaea & Vali, 2015; Redmond et al., 2017; AlWahaibi, 2017; Burkinshaw, 2015). Although interviews can be of different types, the selection of the appropriate one depends on the type of study being undertaken and the researchers' preference; however, semi-structured interviews are the predominant type of interview used. Hence, semi-structured interviews were selected for this research. Leung (2015) also mentioned that a research position that accepts that reality is qualitative in nature and constructed through interactions poses questions such as "what?", "how?" and "why?", rather than numeric queries such as "how much?" or "how many?". Furthermore, Leung (2015) recommended that these queries can be answered using various techniques such as interviews, case studies, participant observations, storytelling and narratology.

Knapik (2006) opined that interviews provide researchers with an opportunity to understand the participants closely and to understand real-life situations. Semi-structured interviews are considered a kind of informal interview: they provide researchers with a flexible framework for conducting an interview in which two forms of communication and conversation are allowed. As the chances of re-interviewing, the participants are low, the interviews must be organised properly so that the researcher can make the best use of the time available with the participants. King et al. (2018) emphasised that conducting a systematised semi-structured interview requires advance sensible planning about familiarising oneself with the participants, determining the amount of interview time required and preparing for the interview.

To address these issues, this study adopted Airini et al.'s (2011) and Pheko's (2014) semi-structured interview strategy as an effective means to collect data, as it provides both structure and flexibility in communication when exploring the information being shared. The initial planning was conducted based on the pilot study, and the time required for each interview was calculated. As mentioned by Pheko (2014), questions on the strategies used by

female leaders were open-ended, which provided the participants with the chance to express themselves passionately. Likewise, there were some questions focused on specific barriers such as work-life balance and gender issues; however, there were also open-ended questions on the barriers the participants faced, which provided an opportunity for the participants to express themselves (Airini et al., 2011). McLeod (2014) emphasised that if a semi-structured interview is selected for data collection, it should take the form of a guided conversation rather than the formal form of an interview. Probing questions were also used to gain a greater understanding and to clarify the context further. This form of data collection method not only provides a deeper understanding but also structured data.

The audiotape was used to record the interviews, and the tapes were later translated and interpreted. Field notes were also taken to record the context and note valuable information. Field notes were only used to confirm the context and scenarios while coding. A total sample of 12 female leaders who are in leadership positions (head of the department and above) in universities was selected for an interview. An appointment was set up with the participants for a face-to-face interview based on the participants' interest in participating and availability (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013) via the university's staff directory and networking. Even though English is widely spoken in the academic sector, and although the interviews were initially planned to be conducted in English, as it is not the first language of the participants, they were also given the option to speak in whatever language they were most comfortable using out of English and Nepali. The interview questions were prepared in both languages. Given that Nepali was the participants' first language and that the participants found it easier to express themselves in Nepali, Nepali was selected for the interview process. As being an insider and knowing the cultural and organisational aspects of Nepal, the whole interview process went smoothly and participants expressed themselves openly. The outcome may not have been this robust had the researcher not been an insider.

The main advantage of conducting semi-structured interviews was that the whole interview process was flexible but also structured. All the questions were answered by the participants without hesitation on their part. They gave good responses and provided the researcher with an in-depth understanding of their perceptions and experiences. The structured element of the process was helpful in relation to remaining within the research context. In addition, the other beneficial aspect of conducting face-to-face interviews was having the opportunity to network with female leaders, understand their behaviours and observe their personalities.

### 4.5.2 Interview guide and interview process

The interview guide was arranged in advance, listing all the issues and questions to be covered during the interviews. The interview questionnaire was prepared based on the information gathered from the literature review. Studies related to female leadership in higher education were used as a reference to organise and set the questions. The main aim of this research is to explore the challenges for female leadership in the higher education sector along with the strategies used by female leaders; therefore, specific questions around these issues were designed based on the literature (see Appendix 2). Based on the gender organisation system approach, role congruity and social role theory, the issues were identified and divided into individual, organisational and societal barriers (; Rowley & Yukongdi, 2009; Cross & Linehan, 2006; Yukongdi & Benson, 2005; Islam & Jantan, 2017). These areas are considered while preparing the interview questionnaire.

All the interviews were conducted in person at various locations, such as campuses and main university buildings, within two districts. As previously mentioned, 12 participants were interviewed from two different universities who are currently working as head of the department or higher. Amongst them, one of the participants recently got promoted to the dean (after the data collection). An appointment was scheduled with each participant by telephone based on their availability. Each interview lasted for at least 30 mins; one was 1 hr 13 mins long (due to some disruptions) – the maximum length. Robson (2002, p. 273) mentioned that “anything under half an hour is unlikely to be valuable; anything going much over an hour may be making unreasonable demands on busy interviewees”. This was true in the current study: as the participants were in leading academic positions, and therefore had very tight schedules, the majority of the interviews lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. The following table provides information regarding the interview dates and total interview time for each participant. The sample interview transcript is provided in Appendix 7.

Table 11: Interview Details

| Participants | Place | Interview Date (dd-mmm-yyyy) | Interview Duration (hh:mm:ss) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant A | University X | 28-Nov-2019 | 00:44:26 |
| Participant B | University X | 24-Nov-2019 | 00:41:00 |
| Participant C | University X | 26-Nov-2019 | 01:13:35 |
| Participant D | University X | 25-Nov-2019 | 00:40:30 |
| Participant E | University X | 24-Nov-2019 | 00:39:37 |
| Participant F | University X | 24-Nov-2019 | 00:58:07 |
| Participant G | University Y | 02-Dec-2019 | 00:31:07 |
| Participant H | University X | 01-Dec-2019 | 00:45:39 |
| Participant I | University X | 03-Dec-2019 | 00:39:21 |
| Participant J | University Y | 02-Dec-2019 | 00:31:36 |
| Participant K | University X | 28-Nov-2019 | 00:30:15 |
| Participant L | University X | 25-Nov-2019 | 00:37:02 |

Each participant was briefed about the aims and objectives of the research by telephone and email while scheduling the appointment (see Appendix 5). On the interview day, the participants were given consent forms that introduced the researcher, the purpose of the research and how the data would be handled. The participants were also informed about the recording of the interviews, both in the consent forms and verbally, before the interviews started (see Appendix 1). The participants were also informed about the length of the interview and were shown the interview questions. The interview started with the researcher introducing herself and asking the participants to introduce themselves. The questions were divided into three major headings, i.e., background questions, professional questions and future plans (see Appendix 2). The background questions provided information about the

participants' general background such as their age, position, qualification, experience and marital status.

The main purpose of this was to understand the demographic data of the participants. The professional questions included all the issues and areas that the study wished to explore. They covered the areas of barriers, support, career experiences, gender-based experiences and current societal and organisational issues. The researcher was pleased that all the women opened up by answering all the questions and providing some interesting facts to back up their statements. After completing the professional questions, each participant was asked about their future plans and their suggestions for aspiring female leaders. Those suggestions were helpful in meeting the last objective of this research.

At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked if they had any questions to ask or anything to add that they felt would be relevant to the research. The majority of the participants appreciated the research topic and found it interesting (see Appendix 6). Some of them expressed their appreciation that research was being conducted in this little-explored area. The participants were asked if they would like the outcome of the study to be sent to them and the researcher collected their email addresses in order to do so. Although the initial phases of scheduling the appointments were difficult, the overall interview process went smoothly. The researcher was grateful for the stories the participants shared and the time they put aside to participate in this research. The researcher also maintained contact with some of the participants after the research and has been building good relationships and networking with them.

## 4.6 Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the human instrument is used for the data collection rather than questionnaires and machines; hence, the role of the researcher is significant (Denzin et al., 2003). Greenbank (2003) advised that the qualitative researcher should explain the relevant aspect of self, any assumptions and expectations, and their ability to conduct the research. This research area has been a topic of interest since the researcher's early days as a student in Nepal. Growing up in a male-dominated society and recognising the struggle faced by women about accessing senior positions, including those in the higher education sector, sparked the researcher's motivation to conduct this research. An initial exploration of the literature also showed that very few studies have examined Nepalese women in leadership

positions. Therefore, this research was conducted to bridge the gap in the literature in relation to the experiences of Nepalese women in academic leadership positions.

Despite some difficulties in arranging the interviews, the interview itself went smoothly without the researcher having to change any of the questions; however, the participants sometimes needed to be probed to gain a deeper understanding. A good rapport was built with the participants, which helped in further networking. They were interested in the researcher's topic and most of them expressed gratitude that the research topic was being investigated. All of them agreed that this area of research is deserving of greater attention. This showed that female leaders want their stories to be heard and to inspire ambitious women to take up leadership roles. McCaslin and Scott (2003,p.454) cited that "[an] understanding of the role of the researcher, provides a bold sketch on a well-framed canvas upon which the vivid colours of a qualitative research study can creatively emerge". Therefore, knowing the role of the researcher helped in overcoming all the potential challenges during the study.

## 4.7 Position of the researcher

The position of the researcher is key in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research; therefore, it is important for the researcher to understand their position as an insider or outsider in the context of their study. There are many arguments related to the position of the researcher. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 55) stated that whether the researcher is an insider or an outsider "the personhood of the researcher, including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research is an important and significant issue within the study". In this research context, data was collected with the researcher as an insider, which was helpful when arranging the interviews. Being an insider, it was beneficial for the researcher to build the networks required to collect the data. However, organising the interviews was challenging due to the work culture in Nepal and the lack of a structured appointment system. It was harder than expected to arrange the interviews with female leaders. Numerous journeys were made to the universities to meet the candidates personally and arrange the appointments. Even though the appointments had been arranged for a certain time, the researcher sometimes had to wait for up to two hours before they took place. These waiting times were helpful with regard to gaining an insight into the work culture within universities in Nepal, female leaders' commitments and their working hours. In addition,

observing the people who went to visit the female leaders provided the researcher with insights into their networking activities.

In addition, thanks to having grown up in the same culture and society, it was helpful for the researcher to understand the emotions of Nepalese women. This study would not have been as detailed and nuanced had the researcher not had insider knowledge of Nepal, proficiency in the language and emotional sympathy with the participants. As an outsider, it would have been difficult to reach a similar outcome for many reasons: 1) arranging the interviews was tough because the university information system is not advanced; therefore, good networking and an understanding of the system in Nepal were vital; 2) the participants were not readily available and normal appointments were not always available; thus, insider knowledge was required to understand the process involved; 3) language could have been a barrier, as the participants stated that they could communicate better in Nepali; 4) insider social and cultural knowledge was important, as it would have been difficult to understand the women's emotions and problems otherwise; and 5) the data collection process was easier to navigate given the researcher's insider knowledge of life in Nepal. Fleming (2018, p. 312) stressed that "insider research within higher education contexts carries many benefits yet confronts the researcher with multiple challenges". Therefore, conducting this research as an insider was beneficial, as it enhanced the outcomes of the study, which may not have been achieved in the same depth by the non-native researcher.

It is challenging for an insider researcher to resist sharing their own experiences, which can influence the participants' thoughts. To ensure that the data was collected without this having any effect, the interviews were conducted from a neutral viewpoint. The researcher had no previous attachment to the organisations or participants before the study; hence, this did not influence the interview process itself. The interviews took place during the first meeting between the researcher and the participants;  there was also no prior bonding with the participants, and the topic was not discussed beforehand either. The trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected are discussed in the data reliability and validity chapter (page 105).

## 4.8 Research Ethics

Ethical decisions take place throughout the research process, from the literature review and reporting on the topic to the data collection, analysis and interpretation (Jessop, 2007).

Creswell (2013) also opined that the ethical issues in qualitative study arise in many stages of research development, from the beginning of the study to the data collection, data analysis, reporting the data and publishing of the study. All the principal procedures laid out by the University of Gloucestershire with regard to ethical considerations were followed throughout this study. The Data Protection Act was followed to ensure that the data was kept safe, not given to any other party, only used for the research purpose and would be destroyed after the completion of the research. Cohen et al. (2011) indicated that since qualitative data exploration focuses on individual cases, issues such as individuals' recognisability, privacy and confidentiality are often prominent. Since the research topic is delicate, involves the participants' (female leaders) stories, and because the analysis moves from their personal to their professional lives to a discussion of the societal and organisational barriers to their development and, most importantly, a discussion of gender issues and stereotyping, hence, interview questions were organised sensibly. The care and moral ethics were followed by being mindful and not raising sensitive topics and expressing sympathy (Jessop, 2007).

Firstly, consent for the study was gained from the University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics Committee and a travel risk assessment form was also completed. Permission to conduct the data collection was granted by the Information Department of X University and individual permission was given by the participants from Y University. Later, a formal consent form was also given to each of the 12 participants before the interviews. The participants were asked to read, complete and sign the consent form (see Appendix 1). The participants were provided with complete information about the purpose of the research, its aims and objectives and the data handling process. Due to the small sample size and the risk of the participants potentially being identified from their responses, the participants were also reassured that their identities would be disguised with another name. Each participant was informed about the audio recording before the interviews and the interviews were only conducted with the participants' authorisation.

King et al. (2018) stated that the main aim of the consent form is to reassure the participants that their data will remain confidential and protected; this includes the security of the audio tape, management of the data, data translation and transcription of the data to ensure anonymity and also providing participants with an explanation about their right to withdraw from the interview at any time. The participants were made fully aware that the information

and data they had disclosed would be used in the study and were also told that if they were not comfortable with any sensitive issue then they could omit it.

The interview questions were given to the participants before the start of the interviews to make them fully aware of the areas the interview would cover, thus minimising potential psychological and emotional harm (Qu Sandy & Dumay, 2011). The participants were asked about their initial review of the interview questions and if they were happy to go ahead with the interview. For privacy, the female leaders' positions were initially confirmed with the universities' staff information desk, and all the data were recorded and then translated. Having been born and raised in Nepal, the researcher was fully aware of the culture and practices in Nepal and within the higher education sector in Nepal. Because the interviews were conducted in Nepal and the researcher was a native of the country, the participants were asked to confirm that they were comfortable with the interviews going ahead. The researcher was also fully aware of culturally, socially and politically sensitive areas; hence, appropriate measures were taken during the data collection to ensure that these sensitive areas were approached appropriately. Even though the University of Gloucestershire has laid out a code of ethics and practices, actual ethical practices differ in each research area, sector and also according to the individual researcher and their approach (Vanclay et al., 2013).

The prime consideration in this research was to protect the privacy of the participants. To achieve this, the participants were first assured that their names and other identifying information would remain confidential; this generates an assumption that the risks are minimal (Saunders et al., 2015). The participants' names would be replaced with a code name, i.e., "Participant A". Furthermore, permission was gained from the participants for the audio recordings, and they were reassured that the recordings would only be used for data analysis and that their data would not be used for any other purpose aside from this research (King et al., 2018).

The collected data were stored on a password-protected computer, and all the field notes were kept in a secure location with a security lock. The printed papers and notes taken during the data analysis phase were also stored in a safe place under lock and key. The interview questions were prepared and presented in a non-judgemental manner. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any time and that the outcome of the research would be provided for them later if they wished. It was decided that the interviews would be conducted in the national language, i.e., Nepali to get the best out of the

candidates. The interviews were then translated into English by the researcher (whose first language is Nepali) with the help of Google Translate.

## 4.9 Data Reliability and Validity

The trustworthiness of the data in qualitative research is a foremost concern. Leung (2015) mentioned that the trustworthiness of the data is often questioned by quantitative researchers about data reliability and validity, which cannot be justified in a similar way in qualitative research. Golafshani (2003) reasoned that data reliability and validity are intricately linked with the positivist (quantitative) ontological position, and hence must be clarified differently in qualitative work. Hadi and Closs (2016) cited that qualitative researchers must create a distinct terminology to distance themselves from the paradigms of positivism. Therefore, the trustworthiness criteria set out by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for qualitative research, i.e., credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability, are adopted in this research.

Credibility involves generating results through qualitative research that are believable and trustworthy from the perspective of the participants in the research and ensuring that there is a balance between reflexivity and subjectivity (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested various approaches through which to address the credibility criteria such as continuous engagement, participant observation, data collection triangulation and research triangulation. Furthermore, they also recommended that external checking and peer review should be conducted to authenticate the primary findings and analysis of the data. Birt et al. (2016, p. 1809) considered member checking as most suitable for those studies where the reality is identified only through the individual's understanding. In order to meet the credibility criteria for this research, firstly, the aims and questions are well-defined, and the literature review is presented in a systematic manner. Two key techniques – member checking and triangulation – will also be employed to establish credibility. Semi-structured interviews are conducted along with observations as a process of data collection triangulation. During the data collection, continuous collaboration with the participants is maintained and data sources, such as university information, are used to gain a deeper understanding of the research phenomena. This aids the researcher in formulating comprehensive research findings that are rich and robust Leung (2015). Likewise, member checking provides a chance for participants to clarify the intentions behind their statements, correct errors and add further information where required (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Similarly, the conclusion and outcome of the study are shared with the participants.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) opined that a close relationship should be maintained between credibility and dependability. It is important to prove that the findings are consistent to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. This involves making sure that other observers who examine the data will come to the same findings and conclusions (Saunders et al., 2009). To achieve this, the data is interpreted and coded properly without missing any details and without the researcher being influenced by their thoughts. The researched data can be cross-checked and shared with other researchers to receive initial feedback on clarity. Likewise, the data can also be cross-checked by comparing it with the field notes taken, any relevant documents and draft transcripts of the participant interviews. To support transferability, a deeper description of the data collection and findings will be provided. The participants' natures and the environment will be also detailed while documenting the research setting. For instance, if an interview is conducted after work, the participant may be tired, and the interview outcomes can be framed accordingly. This allows outsiders to make their own transferability judgements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The final stage is the trustworthiness of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) mentioned that confirmability is about verifying that the conclusions are drawn based on the participants rather than the researcher, thus avoiding research biases. In order to meet this condition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the use of triangulation to verify that the data is consistent with the interpretation and reduce the effect of researcher bias. Fusch et al. (2018) suggested considering other researchers, participants and individuals external to the research for the purpose of triangulation. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) also added that reviews often provide constructive feedback and challenge the phenomena under study. In this study, an external reader will review the work completed and feedback from University of Gloucestershire supervisors will also be considered, which helps in gaining other perspectives on the data.

The audit trail strategy will be adopted to establish the conformability (Hadi & José Closs, 2016). During the entire process of data collection and interpretation, noteworthy and distinctive data are recorded. In addition, explanations will be provided for the creation of the codes, and the rationale for merging codes in a theme. Nowell et al. (2017) recommended that researchers should make themselves familiar with the culture or participating organisation before the data collection takes place. This was considered in this research: the researcher

met the participants prior to the data collection and booked appointments with them, which helped in building relationships and trust.

## 4.10 Data Analysis

The main aim of data analysis in qualitative research is to reduce the bulk amount of data and obtain meaningful information (Demartini & Marchiori, 2018). The information is collected and organised in such a way that it creates a meaningful conclusion that meets the aim of the research. The descriptive data from the interview transcripts and field notes are explained and interpreted during the data analysis (Grbich, 2013). Due to this possibility, qualitative research has been argued and considered to be less reliable than quantitative research (Galdas, 2017). Consequently, it is also challenging for a researcher to organise the data analysis in a systematic manner and to report their impressions transparently and systematically (Anderson, 2010). There are various approaches to data analysis in qualitative research; the most prevalent is the thematic approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a process of recognising, examining and reporting the themes within the data. Creating themes from the data is widely used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2004; Alwahaibi, 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is considered an explanatory process in which data is analytically examined to recognise the patterns inside the data to offer a description of it and link it to particular research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is not a linear process and allows the researcher to go back and forth until a coherent conclusion is derived (Anderson, 2010). Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed that data analysis is accomplished based on a six-step thematic process. The first step is familiarisation with the data when engaging in the process of data analysis. The data from various sources, such as interviews, are transcribed. During the transcription phase, the data are re-studied and re-examined, which is the best way of getting familiar with the data.

The second phase is coding. The coding is done by identifying key concepts, words or reflections. Coding can be done traditionally, using a pen and paper, or by using software, such as NVivo (Basit, 2003). For this research, coding will be done using NVivo. Boyatzis (1998) stated that coding is a foundation for creating a theme. The coding is done concisely and clearly by relating boundaries and occurrences. Once the coding is done, the next procedure is looking for themes. The generated codes are grouped, compared and examined while seeking potential themes. The codes are arranged in tabular theme stacks or mind maps to generate a theme (Basit, 2003). Braun and Clarke (2006) mentioned that the code can be

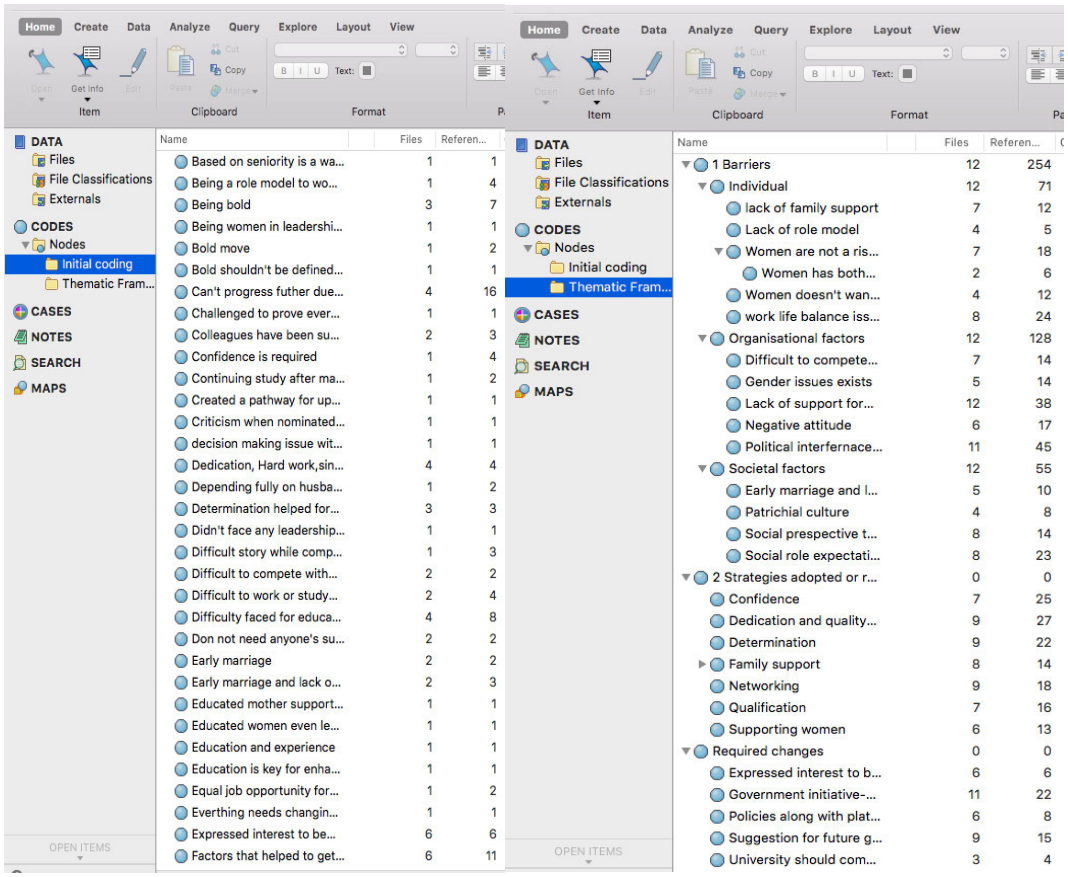
generated from patterns, such as interview topics, or the occurrence of certain factors, such as words, incidents and stories. Reviewing the created theme is the next phase of the analysis. Themes are checked in relation to the codes extracted, and refined modification or separation is needed. The data on each theme are re-studied to confirm that the theme will meet the specified research question and none of the data will be missed. A thematic map is generated at this stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each theme is arranged in a way that each can tell its story while fitting into a broader picture (the overall story), thus meeting the research purpose. The themes are named concisely and are connected with the research question (see Appendix 4).

The final stage of analysis is generating a report, which convinces the reader that the story the data is telling is valid. The report will not just describe the story; it will also be used to create arguments related to the literature and to answer the research questions (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). There are two major strategies in data analysis: inductive and deductive. When new patterns are identified from the data, thus deriving a conclusion or theory, it is considered an inductive strategy, whereas the deductive strategy tests the existing theory (Gabriel, 2013). As this research is seeking to draw a conclusion from the themes and patterns, rather than validating a theory that already exists, the inductive strategy is best suited to this research.

### 4.10.1 Coding and theme formation

NVivo software offers a means of linking participants' views and observing and exploring patterns in the data and ideas collected. The first stage was transferring all the interview transcripts from the computer hard drive to NVivo, which was done by creating a file in NVivo. During the coding stage, each transcript was individually accessed, read line by line, highlighted and coded in the same manner. The next step was bringing all the codes together that fell under the same area of focus. All these codes were arranged together and were later arranged into themes derived from the gender organisation system approach and the research questions, such as societal, organisational and individual barriers. The above process underwent various changes as the data were added, in terms of coding and creating themes. NVivo provided considerable flexibility to the researcher familiarising themself with the data, examining it and coding the data with confidence.

Figure 5: Organisation of the Data based on Theme (NVivo)




(see more in Appendix 4) (editor: researcher)

## 4.11 Data Presentation

By the end of the data analysis, the data are arranged based on themes. The concepts are refined and linked to explain the main theme (Hadi & José Closs, 2016). Any distinctive concepts and themes will be placed together, building an integrated clarification that is interpreted by linking to the literature or the theoretical framework. This helps in developing an underlying theme that ties different parts of the data together (Nowell et al., 2017). Direct quotations will be used for the interview data. As there can be challenges of presenting qualitative data comprehensively, data presentation is prepared wisely contemplating the research questions (Richards & Morse, 2012). It can undoubtedly be the case that the researcher may be tempted to include certain data that may not reconcile with the information being examined. Therefore, to avoid situations like this, during the data presentation, the links back to the literature and the research questions are kept in mind by the researcher. Practical restraints may also limit the presentation of integral data; consequently, fragmented and de-contextualised data will be presented.

The outcomes of the data collection will be presented as follows (Sutton & Austin, 2015):

- A heading is given to a theme and codes are presented that exemplify the thoughts of the researcher.
- The themes will be organised in relation to the research questions.
- Some of the highlights from the findings are presented using a colour scheme specific to each participant. The colour scheme assigned to each participant is shown in Table 10 (p.93-94).
- The assumptions to be drawn from the participant's narratives are examined with support from the participants' words while moving from one code to another or from one theme to another.
- Findings from the literature can be used to support the outcome.

## 4.12 Limitations

Despite meeting the aim of the research, there were some limitations, which could not be avoided. There is a significant gender imbalance in leadership roles in the higher education sector in Nepal. Hence, only a few female leaders were interviewed for this research, and only 12 women committed to taking part in the interviews. The other factors were time constraints and the lack of financial resources to conduct extensive research. Due to poor transport links and the geographical location of other universities, this research was only conducted within two major universities in Nepal. However, it is fair to say that the percentage of women in higher education leadership positions is almost nil in other universities except for the top two (which were included in this research). Another complicating factor was the lack of up-to-date personal data in the university directory, which made it difficult to contact the female leaders at other universities, even for a phone interview. Finally, the work culture within the universities was a little chaotic; there were some instances where the interviews were interrupted (i.e., the interview had to be paused to address issues such as a person randomly turning up in the interview room). It is possible that more detailed conclusions could have been reached had these interruptions not taken place. In some contexts could have been a detailed conclusion if it was not interrupted.

## 4.13 Summary

This chapter has presented a discussion of the research methodology that led the data collection process. To meet the purpose of the study, an interpretivist ontology and constructivist approach, along with a feminist epistemology, provided the viewpoint taken about constructing knowledge. Based on these paradigms, a deeper understanding of the research problem was achieved. As used by other researchers (e.g., Airini et al., 2011; Alwahaibi, 2017; Byerly, 2014), the qualitative approach was selected for this research, which helped the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of women's experiences and perspectives. Among the several tools available for data collection, semi-structured interviews were considered the most appropriate. Interviews were arranged with female leaders in the Nepalese higher education sector in order to explore their journeys.

In addition, the data sampling, pilot study and role of the researcher have also been discussed in this chapter. Likewise, the ethical considerations were also examined in this chapter. The process of analysing the collected data in a systematic manner through thematic analysis is also presented in this chapter. In order to address reliability and validity issues that are potentially present in objective research, the trustworthiness criteria set out by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were followed. These were presented in this chapter in detail.

Based on the methods discussed above, the following chapter presents the findings that emerge from the study that help to meet the research aims and objectives. The data collected through the interviews and observations will be analysed in the next chapter. In line with the nature of qualitative research and thematic analysis, the anonymised individual opinions and experiences gathered during the course of this study will be shared in the form of selected citations taken from the interview transcripts. The depth of the information shared by the participants offers inspiration for aspiring female leaders in the higher education sector in Nepal.

# Chapter 5. Themes and Findings

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data and findings from the interviews conducted with 12 female leaders in the higher education sector in Nepal. The outcomes of the study, based on female leaders' experiences in Nepalese higher education institutions, are organised in accordance with the research questions, which are listed below:

1) What barriers are Nepalese women academic leaders encountering while progressing into senior roles?
2) What strategies are Nepalese women academic leaders adopting in order to overcome leadership barriers?
3) How can women's access to leadership positions be enhanced in the higher education sector in Nepal?

The qualitative method was used for collecting the data using interviews as a tool. The responses of the participants were checked based on frequency analysis to confirm if they were individual views or triangulated to those of other respondents. The data obtained through the interviews provided deeper clarity and information relevant to the research questions. To facilitate the presentation of the data and findings, this chapter is organised based on the thematic analysis. For that, coding was first carried out and the generated codes were grouped to generate themes. The complete data on each theme was re-studied to confirm that the theme would meet the specified research question and to ensure that none of the data would be missed. These themes were identified in the literature review and linked to research questions. Quotations are offered in each theme to present participant's experiences in their own voices and to support interpretation. Since quotations are used as evidence in qualitative research promoting scientific rigour as in reliability and validity of data (Eldh et al., 2020), therefore quotes that illustrate the finding and validate the research are selected and presented in this chapter. Quotes from different participants are presented to add transparency and trustworthiness to the data interpretation and findings. Some interesting stories and arguments made by participants are highlighted in colour to increase the focus. The following sections will present this data.

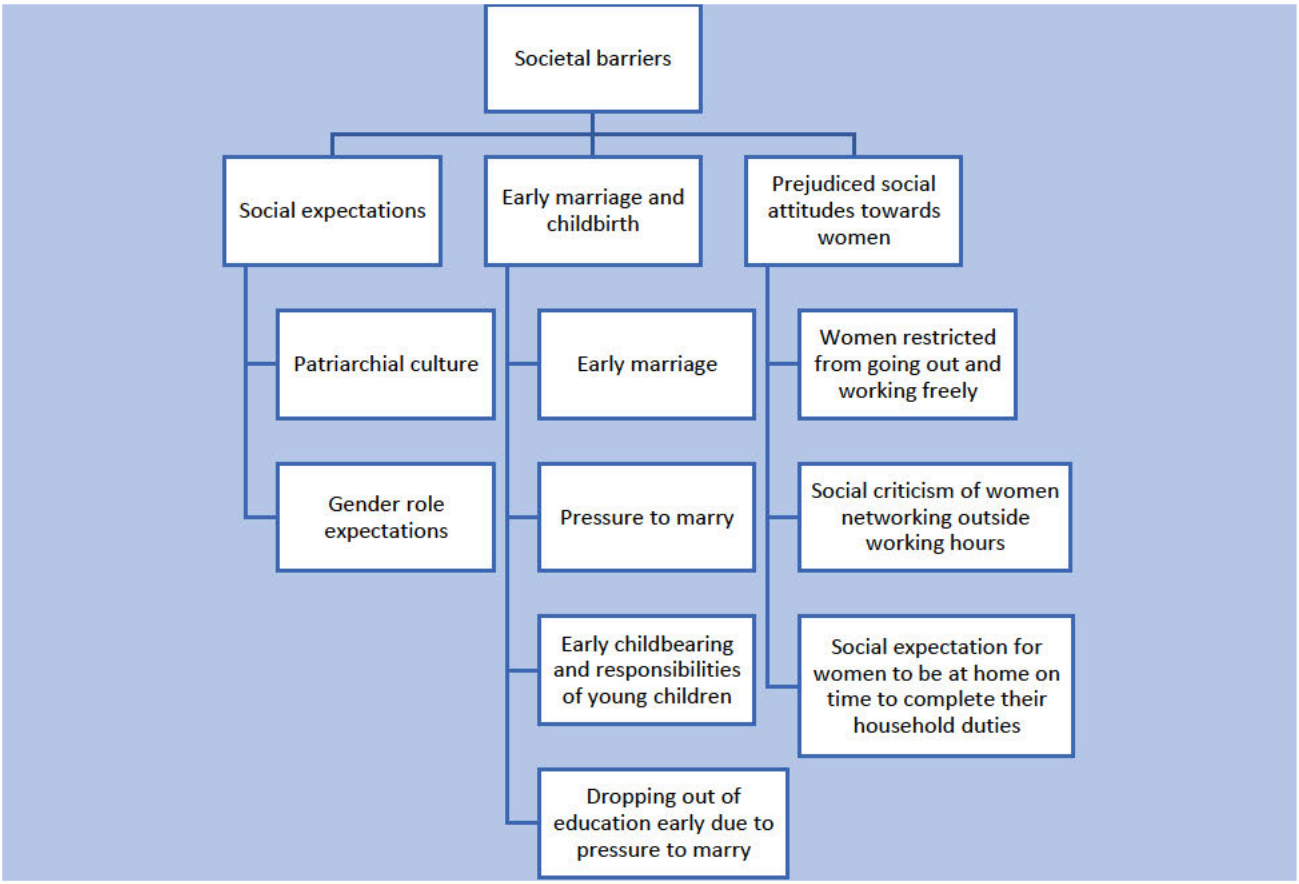
## 5.2 Participants' perceptions of the factors that cause barriers for Nepalese women who wish to progress into leadership roles

The findings revealed various subthemes, which are divided into key themes. These themes are then divided into key three areas of barriers as guided by the Gender Organisation System approach; that is, societal barriers, organisational barriers and individual barriers. Multiple realities were discovered, which are discussed further in the following sections.

### 5.2.1 Societal barriers

The participants discussed various factors such as Nepal's patriarchal culture, gender role expectations, the pressures of early marriage and childbearing causing them to drop out of education early, social restrictions for women, criticism of women networking outside work and expectations for women to be at home on time to fulfil their duties. These factors are divided into three key themes, which are derived from the content of the interviews. Only the major themes are listed as headings, and all the subthemes associated with a particular theme are discussed under these headings.

Figure 6: Themes and Subthemes Related to Societal Factors



#### 5.2.1.1 Social expectations

This was considered one of the major barriers to women's career development. Men are considered to occupy the supreme position in the family and society and are provided with all the power. When describing the barriers faced by female leaders, almost all of the participants mentioned the deeply rooted patriarchal culture in Nepal and its impact on their growth and development. Female leaders stated that differences in gender role expectations for men and women in society have resulted in the power being given to men, while limiting women from working outside the home. Women are expected to fulfil all the responsibilities at home even when they are working just as long as men.

Participant J explained that the main barrier starts with the patriarchal culture restricting women from going out and working freely. Women are expected to be at home by a certain time and to complete their housework even though they are working. Hence, for a woman to go and work outside the house, she must work around this issue: "*Nepal has a patriarchal culture. [The] main barriers start from there. It is difficult for Nepalese women to go out and work freely. We still have that barrier. We all are tangled in that culture*". The lack of freedom for women was also discussed by Participant E, who claimed that this happens to be the story for the majority of women in Nepal. Women have to complete the housework despite working equally long hours as men; in addition, she claimed that men just come home after work and relax. She said, "*Women have dual responsibilities. Even after their work, females are compelled to engage in their household work, whereas the males will just sit and have a refreshing drink*".

As Luitel (2001, p. 100) notes, the Nepalese "patriarchal system believes that men do the right things and provide [the] right judgement to all, so they are made strong and powerful both physically and mentally through socialization". This provides men with the ultimate power and suppresses women's chances to lead. The participants expressed their view that men do not like women to be more successful than them. Participant D shared a story about her friend. Her husband was a supporter of her progress until he realised that his wife was getting into a better position than him at work, so he stopped her from working outside the home: "*As soon as women's participation was boosted, he forced his wife to stay home, but she denied [him this] and they divorced. [... I]f a guy was in this position, his wife would never ask him to give away his position and stay home*". She claimed that the culture of male supremacy and men's feelings of insecurity have also led many women to stop working and

start staying at home. Through viewing her friend's situation, this participant also discovered that society expects women to be tolerant in every situation: "*Through [watching] their divorce, what I have noticed is that society thinks women always have to be tolerant in many [more] circumstances than men*".

The participants verified that gender role expectations exist in Nepalese society and that these put more responsibility on women to conform to the norm of looking after the family first and anything else after that. This situation was described by the majority of the participants: they felt that they had to prove themselves inside the house and outside the house. Women who are successful in their careers are not necessarily exempt from household chores; they regrettably have to face criticism for not looking after the family and household. Participant H shared the struggle that she had to face while doing her PhD. She explained how challenging it was for her to continue with her studies while her family was complaining about her accountability for her son. Moreover, she also mentioned how people had a negative attitude towards her study.

> **Participant H:** "I was married when I was doing my PhD. There were constant questions, like what the need for education was and what could I achieve given [that] it was so difficult to study. Nobody could really understand. Even at home, I recall being told I was studying too much as I had a son to look after."

As noted by Participant H, women face criticism for not carrying out their primary role as a wife, daughter-in-law or mother if they consider studying or working. Moreover, it is not just condemnation from the family that women have to face; they also become a victim of criticism from wider society. Participant L confirmed this situation by narrating the story of her struggle. She discussed how people used to criticise her for making her husband do the household chores.

***Participant L:*** *"*When I was doing my PhD, I used to rent a house nearby. I used to [go] to the class[es] and go home and do all the household [work]. But two days a week, I would be very busy and would not get time to go home and eat, even. So those two days, my husband used to prepare lunch and dinner. But people used to criticise me for that too, saying that I was studying [for] my PhD [and] making my husband do the household work."

Some of the participants blamed their mother-in-law as being responsible for the limitations placed on women. As families in Nepal still live in an extended family, the mother-in-law typically holds "the top position in a hierarchical family network among the women and withholds the authority and power in the family" (Luitel, 2001, p. 102). Therefore, a married woman is expected to follow her mother-in-law's rules, which are made based on the experiences she had as a daughter-in-law herself. This was expressed by Participant D, who said that a woman who has been frightened all her life about male supremacy will not behave appropriately towards her daughter-in-law. She further declared that this fear makes women psychologically hesitant and unable to move themselves forward. She blamed men and considered them to be responsible for this.

**Participant D:** "And we have a patriarchal society, where a mother-in-law who did not get [the] right treatment believes [she can] treat her daughter-in-law the same way and practice that. Moreover, yesterday, they were afraid of their father; today, they are afraid of their husband; and tomorrow, they will be afraid of their children. All these fears have made them psychologically unable to lift themselves up and [move] forward."

In addition, the participants also claimed that having an uneducated mother-in-law could be even more challenging. Participant H discussed the complications associated with having an uneducated mother-in-law. Her main challenge was to complete her studies alongside being competent in her household work. She stated that she was brave to have completed her studies in addition to managing household chores, and she also mentioned that things are better these days. She asserted: "*It was tricky to deal with our mother-in-law, as she was not educated. There is a challenge for us to be competent inside and outside our homes*".

Participant F argued that women are not committed to the responsibilities at work due to the gender role expectations at home. She said, "*Even here [at the higher education institution at which I work] we have female teachers who don't want to teach extra hours and don't want to attend any programs due to their responsibility toward the house[hold]. So, yes there are women who have been ignoring [work responsibility] due to their roles at home*".

#### 5.2.1.2 Early marriage and childbearing

Although marriage and childbearing are considered a part of women's social obligations in Nepal, the culture of early marriage and the pressures of childbearing has been described as significant barriers for many Nepalese women. The participants mentioned that a huge number of female students drop out of education soon after completing their bachelor's degree due to the pressure of early marriage or childbearing. Female enrolment only gets worse as the level of education increases, which ultimately impacts the overall percentage of qualified females up against male applicants.

Participant C said that the family pressures associated with early marriage have caused many women to drop out of education early; hence, only a handful of women are left in higher degree courses when it comes to gaining higher-level qualifications.

> **Participant C:** "There is a family pressure for women to get married during their bachelor's degree, and [if they receive] a reasonable proposal for marriage, they give in and up to 75% of women – including the ones in the higher education sector – get married. Somehow, [some] manage to complete their master's but just a handful manage [their] PhD. So generally, master's and PhDs are done after marriage and because of these situations, the women can't reach their potential."

She further added that in most of the cases, higher-level degrees such as master's and PhDs are completed after marriage unless there is family support to avoid interruption to their studies. However, she also mentioned the fact that women in cities do comparatively better than those in rural areas: "*In cities, more women are seen to complete [degrees] up to master's [level] before their marriage*". On a related note, Participant F also cited the same fact regarding women starting to drop out of education after undergraduate level and that it gets worse as soon as they start having family responsibilities: "*Girls usually get married*

*after undergraduate level, [and] they form a nuclear family. She starts having a responsibility towards the family, which causes [her] to drop out*".

The participants also claimed that women experienced social pressure to get married at an early age rather than pressure from their families. Those who had a supportive family revealed that things were much easier for them, even though their family had to experience criticism from society. Participant L said that early marriage and pressure from society are still prevalent issues. She shared her own story and explained the pressure from society that her father had to go through for educating her and not forcing her to get married: "*My father had a lot of pressure too. Everyone would warn him not to educate me, as educating girls [would] create trouble for him. But my father was an educated person himself, and he didn't listen to anyone. He would come and talk to me about the marriage [offers] but if I den[ied] him, he [would] not force me on that. So I never had that trouble*". She further explained that the situation is worse in rural areas due to the social practice of not considering the daughter as a part of the family. As a result, girls are deprived of a good education: "*They think [of] girls more as a part of [the] other family she will be marrying. So, they think there is no [point in] educating girls. Hence, the girl is focused on[to] household chores due to that culture*".

In the same vein, Participant K also talked about the culture of early marriage and childbirth. She said that the situation has not improved much from 30 years ago in rural areas due to the lack of education for women. She claimed, "*It feels like we are in darkness, as we have not been able to provide education to women in rural areas of Nepal. Otherwise, things were very different 30 years ago, [when] getting married very early was the norm; [however, this is] still the case in many places*".

On the other hand, Participant A argued that balancing family life and personal growth depends on the women themselves. She said, "*I still say that such things depend on the woman herself. Marriage is a social phenomenon and giving birth to a child is a natural process, so if a woman is educated and confident, she will be able to manage the situation and uplift herself*". Although this is a somewhat applicable point, the situation can be challenging even if women are educated and confident, as evidenced by the points made by the participants in the discussion above. Therefore, I reason that managing the pressures of marriage and childbearing is not reliant on the education and confidence levels of women in Nepal; rather, it depends on family support and understanding.

Even though the situation has been described as being worse in rural areas, the overall impact of early marriage and childbearing can be seen in all areas of Nepal. As described by the participants, women's enrolment in and access to higher education drops after the bachelor's degree level, which has been linked to the pressure to marry young. Women are forced to get married when they are at the prime age with regard to education and personal development. This prevents them from achieving equal growth as men, which affects their overall career development process.

#### 5.2.1.3 Prejudiced attitudes of society towards women

As previously discussed, Nepalese society has a deeply rooted patriarchal culture, and it starts from early childhood. There is a difference in how a son is treated as opposed to a daughter, and various social obligations that embody prejudice with respect to gender continue throughout one's life. The participants argued that girls and women have to face social criticism when they come home late, but that this criticism does not apply to boys and men. Similarly, women are also expected to be home on time and to fulfil their duties, but there is no social obligation for men to be home on time and to do any household chores. The participants said that society instead criticises women for making men do household chores, if the husband supports his wife by doing them, and women are blamed for any kind of failure within the family.

While reflecting on the societal perspective towards women, Participant C said, "*The society is still conservative and the fact that the women these days are driving their own vehicles, work[ing] in their own time and can be late at times [is] still seen as a problem".* She also explained that society gets involved in these kinds of matters. She discussed the story of her household, where her son never is asked where he was if he comes home late but the daughter is never allowed free time outside the home.

Furthermore, she testified that the situation in the field of education is relatively better in comparison to other fields, where women are expected to work long shifts and weekend shifts. However, she asserted that even if there is an understanding between the wife and husband, there might be an argument with the other family members (such as the in-laws), which could potentially result in women being challenged by wider society for not handling the household properly. She said, "*The good understanding between a husband and a wife makes things easier, but if the family (in-laws) come in between, there is a dilemma between*

*home and career [that] results in mental disturbance. In this situation, society challenges women, saying they haven't handled the household management well".*

Participant E also expressed similar thoughts and further elaborated on the fact that women who interact with men outside the home are also not perceived positively by society. She recommended that this kind of social disgrace needs to be eradicated to encourage women's development; therefore, she said that "*changes from head to toe [are] necessary*".

> **Participant E:** "If a woman comes home late at night (between 9 and 10) – [if] she is a working lady, she might be busy with work – you can hear the gossip. If a woman roams around with males, society starts to take it negatively. This social stigma needs [to] change."

In fact, Participant B admitted that she feels hesitant about staying at work until late, as she is concerned about what society might think about her: "*We face hesitation about [staying] out of the house till late. It makes us think about what society starts thinking about us"*. She said that when women face this kind of dilemma, they simply cannot progress much. Participant D also claimed that women do not like to spend long hours at university: they feel pressure from family and society that a woman is expected to be home on time to complete her household chores. This participant said that women have to face psychological pressure from their families and criticism from society; she asserted that society is a barrier to women's growth as everything women do has to be within the boundaries society has set for women. She accepted that the standard of questioning girls exists in her household too: "*If a boy does not come home for three days, we don't get bothered, but if a girl is late by an hour [...] we have a culture of asking, 'Where have you been?'"*. This kind of culture has set in place a rule for a woman from an early age, wherein she has to be at home at a given time, whereas a man enjoys freedom throughout his life. As a result, women cannot commit themselves to long hours of work and must conceivably settle for a job with lower demands and fewer responsibilities.

Although Participant I related her statement to other sectors, her main point demonstrated that women have to suffer criticism from society if their children do not perform well. She found that society makes a woman feel blamed no matter how hard-working she is and how successful she is, as she is expected to be perfect in relation to her duties at home. She

reasoned that these factors are responsible for preventing women from accepting long hours and jobs that require a high level of commitment.

> **Participant I:** "When they are dealing with making, dealing, spending and praying for the welfare of the organisation when they are working, suddenly [women] will find that [...] society here [...] will make the women feel guilty. [People] will start raising questions like, 'You worked to improv[e the] bank, but when will you improve the house?' This is stereotypical."

Not only this, but a son is treated better than a daughter in Nepalese society, which also creates gender bias. The son gets priority in most of the cases, and there is discrimination even when it comes to education. Sons are regarded as key members of the family who will take the next generation forward and so all the investments are made in them. Girls are considered lesser in every aspect. This was also expressed by Participant K, who revealed that *"[s]ons are treated well and are sent to better schools than daughters"*. She also explained that the main problem with regard to gender discrimination is considering girls as a burden on the family: "*The root cause of the problem here is that they consider a [female] child as a burden: a girl [female] child is aborted, [because families are] worried about giving a dowry"*. Moreover, Participant B also stressed that some families do not support their daughter's education, while some others might consider their daughter's education but would not support education for their daughter-in-law: "*We still have a family [system] where girls' education is not encouraged. There are also families where a daughter is encouraged [to get an] education but not [the] daughter-in-law*".

On a different note, Participant L revealed that even educated families have a mindset of dominating women. She blamed the wider culture and the thinking associated with the older generation, for whom gender inequality was considered the norm. Therefore, she argued that the change should start by guiding the new generation: "'*Women should be dominated' – such a frame of mind even exists in an educated family. I think it is more influenced by culture. Old age people or people who hold preconceived notions about gender inequality, attitudes or beliefs cannot be transformed easily. We should start with the new generation*".

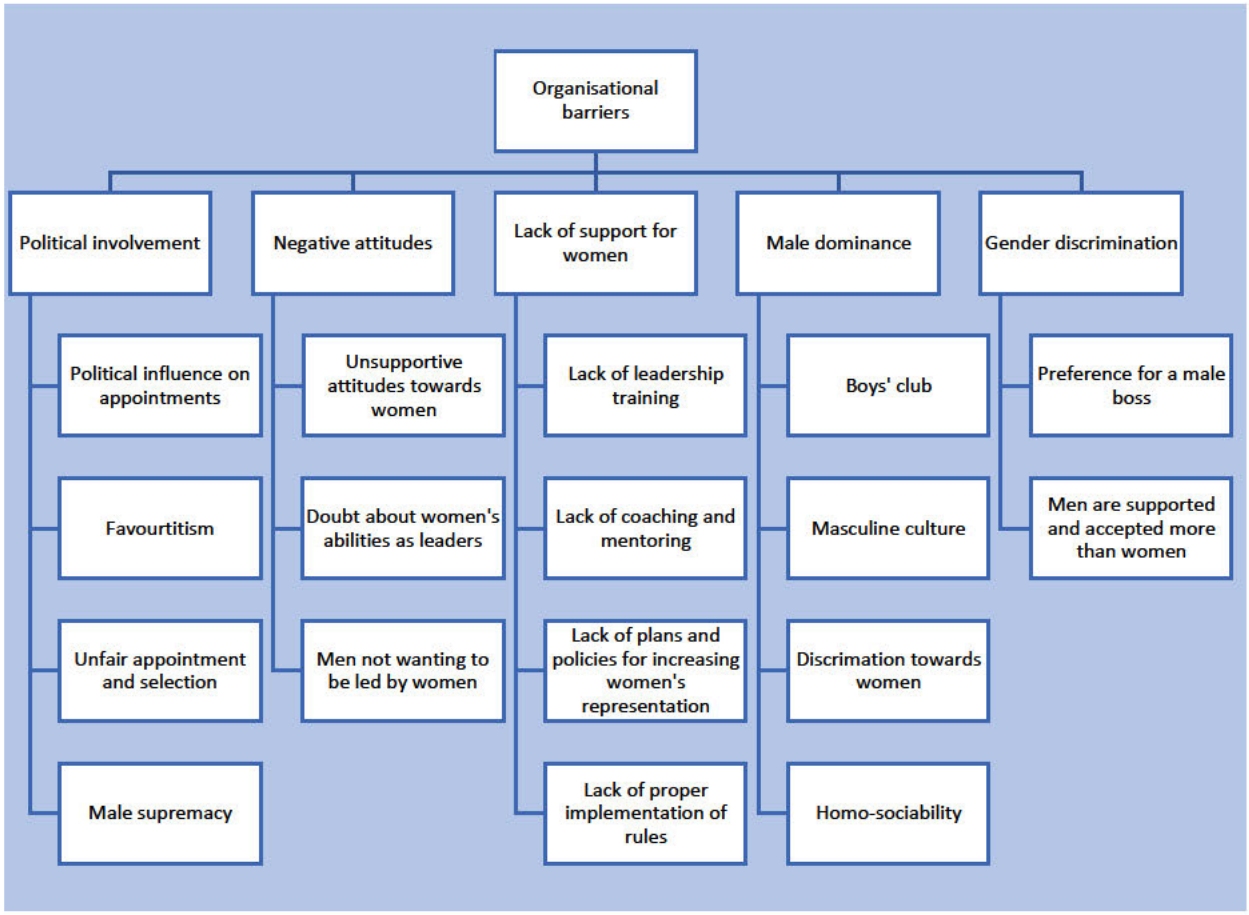
Despite the fact that women are gradually stepping up into higher positions at work there are still challenges associated with gender role expectation, cultural and societal expectations and

gender-stereotyped attitudes towards women, which prove to be a significant barrier to women's progression.

### 5.2.2 Organisational barriers

The other significant barrier associated with women's development is the organisation in which she works and its culture. The participants discussed the fact that there are various obstacles for women who wish to progress into senior roles in the Nepalese higher education sector; these include the influence of politics on higher education and its impact, unsupportive women's attitudes towards other women, negative attitudes about female leadership, a masculine culture, the preference for a male leader, a lack of training and coaching, and the existence of a boys club. These issues are divided into five major themes derived from the discussion of the extant literature. Only the major themes are listed as headings; all the subthemes associated with a particular theme are discussed within that theme.

Figure 7: Themes and Subthemes Related to Organisational Factors



#### 5.2.2.1 Political involvement and unfair appointments

Almost all the participants cited that political involvement in the higher education sector affected women's career progression. The majority of these remarks were made by the women participants working at the government-funded universities the women participants from the privately funded universities had slightly different views. The government-funded universities are ruled and controlled by the Education Ministry and University Grant Commission, which are based on politics. Since the political situation in Nepal is not stable and has gone through multiple changes in recent decades, it has a direct impact on university appointments and promotions. The participants disclosed that appointments are based on political favouritism; therefore, it is almost impossible to get promoted without being active in politics. Given that the participants communicated that they are not involved in politics, their chances of promotion appear slim.

> **Participant K:** "Political interference in education, includ[ing] political appointments, is prevalent. We do have a lot of intellectuals and educated people, but they can't come forward – or even if they do, there is no environment for such people to do well, as there is no support."

This situation has proved unappealing for many female leaders with an ambition to succeed. Participant A articulated that recruitment at university is politically influenced, so it is not possible to get anywhere just by desiring a role and applying. Hence, she said that she is not interested in applying for any senior position within the organisation and would prefer to start anew somewhere else: "*I don't see many people who have such [a] strong and well-managed style of working here. But if you ask me, I think I am less interested to continue [to work] more in the same field. I want to try a new career somewhere else". In the same vein,* Participant H was of the view that she could not get promoted because she has not been politically active. A culture of favouritism was often referenced as being disadvantageous for women, as they are not politically involved, whereas men have been supported with unfair appointments. Therefore, the influence of politics in the higher education sector in Nepal has been described as a problematic one for women.

**Participant F:** "There are two things in this: one is male dominance, and the other is political favouritism. This political influence is certainly creating trouble for women."

**Participant E:** "Political influence must be decreased, and I feel that females work with full dedication."

The participants shared a few stories to illustrate the fact that the unfair selection process in the higher education sector in Nepal is due to political nepotism. Participant F argued that for someone to be appointed based on political favouritism, while others are ignored based on a political issue, is incorrect. She described an occurrence where the male candidate with less experience was appointed against the female candidate who had many years of experience. While describing the incident, she also expressed her view that "it is very obvious that political party favouritism is very high".

***Participant F:*** "Even here, recently, for the post of campus chief, [there was] someone from our department who has PhD, [has] worked here for 30 years doing lecturing and has even worked as assistant campus chief. We wanted [her] to get this role, as we prefer female campus chiefs in this girl's college, and we even requested that [from] the main university. But a male who has less experience was forcefully appointed as campus chief."

A similar story of an unfair appointment was also discussed by Participant E, who revealed an incident in which a male candidate was appointed as head of the campus despite the institution petitioning to have a female head. She claimed that the appointment was made through political intervention and stressed how influential recommendations are when it comes to being nominated for a job at a university.

When talking about this incident, Participant E expressed the fact that the situation in Nepal is tough for women and that almost everyday situations like this become a barrier for women. However, she believes that "*if the system is reformed, there are lots of qualified females for the leadership role*". Similarly, Participant B and Participant I also discussed an interesting incident in which a female VC was only appointed for three months and then replaced by a male VC due to political interference. This story of unfair dismissal was raised by a few

participants, who talked about gender discrimination and a lack of support for women, including political interference. The woman who was promoted and then demoted was commended as being a person who knew the university system very well and was considered to be the right candidate for the post according to the participants.

> **Participant B:** "You know, our rector [was] promoted [to] a vice-chancellor. She was only promoted for three months. She has four years of experience and knows all the system. There has been another person appointed as vice-chancellor. I can feel the gender discrimination. She has the experience to be promoted to vice-chancellor. A new person [is] require[d] to understand the system before making any progress, which takes half of his term."

On the other hand, Participant D claimed that not every committee suffers from political influence and that appointments are purely based on qualifications and experience. She asserted that those who cannot prove themselves as being competent through their qualifications, research and experience are rejected; thus, no one can complain about the decision. She felt that the political situation does not seem to have any direct impact on her privately funded university. These participants did not mention anything related to political interference and instead disagreed that political involvement has impacted women-only progression in the higher education sector: *"Social and political issues have an impact in the whole nation. I don't believe there is any particular [prejudice] just for women" (Participant J).*

The overall findings suggest that political influence is an issue in the higher education sector in Nepal and that women have realised that it has an impact on their progress. Not only does this mean that it is impossible to get into roles without being politically involved; but it has also proved that staying in one's position can be equally hard as a result of political intervention. Also, being in a political party can be challenging, as the political situation in Nepal is very unstable, so any changes in politics can easily impact one's appointment and tenure at a university.

Although politics is considered as the main way of moving forward in one's career', interestingly, almost all of the female leaders (participants) stated that they are not interested in politics and would not like to get involved.

#### 5.2.2.2 Negative attitudes

As discussed in the literature, universities are hugely influenced by masculine culture, and the majority of the leadership positions are occupied by men (Zhao & Jones, 2017). This appears to create an unwelcoming atmosphere for women and produces negative attitudes towards female leadership. These problems were discussed by a few participants, who described their belief that men do not consider women as leaders and often doubt their ability to lead and succeed. Participant E shared her story about the negative attitudes of men at the university at which she worked. She described the criticism she had to face before even starting work in the position: "*They believe females can't handle it. Before I got into this role, people criticised [me] and mentioned that I [wouldn't] be able to do this. I found out later. They take this kind of message higher up*". Similarly, Participant F also voiced concerns about men's judgmental attitudes towards women: "*There are many men who still think women can't do anything*". This indicates that men have a negative outlook on women's ability to succeed in leadership positions. Moreover, Participant B also mentioned that men often complained about these women and "*tr[ied] to down look on women*".

However, Participant F made an interesting remark: she asserted that the new generation is more positive towards female leadership, while the old generation rejects women as leaders. "*[The] new generation accepts women as leaders. But the old generations are bureaucrats, and they won't accept women as a leader. They prefer women to be under them.*" Given that it was found that attitudes are changing with the passing generations, this must give some hope to future female leaders. However, it cannot be denied that it will take a few years for the situation to get better. Furthermore, this participant also made a noteworthy statement, saying: "*Those who have studied in boys-only school/college? They don't want many women in the role. That is what I feel*". By saying this, she highlighted the importance of mixed-sex education, as this enables males and females to gain an understanding and appreciation of the behaviour of each other; as a result, they will appreciate each other's leadership qualities regardless of gender.

In addition, Participant J underlined that although there are various social challenges associated with women leaders, professional challenges are mainly associated with men: "*Professionally, we have more challenges associated with the men than women*". She also expressed the fact that some male colleagues still do not accept her as a leader, which she reasons is "*due to their ego*". In the same vein, Participant L also suffered criticism of her

ability to lead when she was first appointed to her role. She compared the behaviour of her male colleagues and women colleagues when she was first nominated and admitted that women praised and appreciated her work while men behaved differently towards her.

> ***Participant L:*** *"*When I was first nominated, there [wa]s a huge [amount of] criticism saying, 'How can women lead [in] a role like this?' Even the staff behaved differently – making work difficult – when I first joined in, as there were no women in the lead position. They tried to look down on me. Women, they have started praising [me]. They come and say, 'Proud of you ma'am'. Women at a higher level also appreciate my work."

In contrast, Participant C mentioned that although her appointment was not perceived overwhelmingly positively, she did receive a good response from everyone. She instead said that people have different views and different ways of performing their duties. Hence, people express their preference for how things should be done rather than their preference with regard to the gender of the leader. She mentioned that there has been some resistance to what she has done so far; however, she seemed to be reflecting positively on this issue: "*There are different views from different people, with different suggestions. But different people carry out their duties differently. People do want things to be done in their way, and [they] express what they want*".

Generally speaking, the participants' responses show that negative attitudes exist in the higher education sector in Nepal and that these seem to cast doubt over women's capabilities and abilities as leaders. Some of the stories shared, in which women had to face criticism with regard to their capacities as a leader before even starting in a position, indicated that men do hold prejudices towards women. Moreover, the participants also stated that men do not want any women to be leaders and do not want to work under women. This can be considered as an attitude that echoes the mindset of the patriarchal society in Nepal, where men are the most powerful people and women are expected to be in the shadow of men.

#### 5.2.2.3 Lack of support for women

The participants mentioned various factors that confirmed that the lack of support for women's career development is an issue. While the participants highlighted the importance of training and development programs, almost all the participants (10 of them) confirmed that they have not received any training for leadership and career development that is supported

by their university. Some of the participants further claimed that the support was provided only to men or anyone with a good political and social network. Participant C revealed that only people who are closely connected to the senior management get a chance to participate in those programs: "*We touched on networking and connections earlier too: the people [with] good connections with the upper management are sent in groups to such programmes*".

Participants G, B, C, D and J all discussed the importance of leadership training and programs and also confirmed that they had never been to any kind of training sessions offered by the university but that they have found themselves opportunities for training through various other means. Participant B said that she had not been to any leadership programs offered by the university but that she has been to some through her networking: "*I have been to some leadership programs sometimes – through outside networking*". In the same manner, Participant D also mentioned that her university does not provide support through those kinds of programmes and that she had experienced them through her travel abroad: "*So, my leadership development took place through my travel abroad. I also took leadership training [while] travelling to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*".

Participant E was the only one to claim that her university-provided training. "*Yes, the university provides a training program for employee[s], like twice or thrice*," she said. However, she also added that there are not enough women in decision-making positions to support each other; therefore, women do not come forward and remain unforthcoming: "*For the majority, there aren't enough female[s]. So, most of the time we remain silent*".

While major problems have been primarily linked to the universities, some of the participants also considered that the government should be held equally responsible for women's development. Since higher positions at universities are appointed by the government, Participant K was of the opinion that the government should be responsible for supporting women. Her reason for the current lack of support was that there is no good leadership in the government in relation to supporting women: "*It is up to the government as well to play an important role in women's development. However, we don't have effective leadership, unfortunately*". In addition, Participant I expressed her opinion, which was that women are not considered competent enough by the government and therefore are not considered when they are selected for higher roles. She said, "*When it gets to the top, the higher government level do the selection and they won't see women as competent. So there [are] still stereotypical thoughts [about women in leadership roles]*". She further claimed that career

progression planning is designed especially for men and that it ignores women: "*Succession plan[ning] is limited to males. They won't even think of you or making someone female a successor*".

There were also arguments made about the quota system and how it has been misused. Although there are certain seats allocated for women, Participant H argued that recruitment policies have not been followed as required; therefore, there is a significantly lower level of representation of women in higher positions despite there being reasonable numbers of eligible women: "*So universit[ies] have to give certain seats to women when they all are qualified. The professor is the highest rank, and there are lots of women in that position. What is next for them?*" She further expressed her dissatisfaction by reflecting on the fact that men are in demand in all positions, while women are not even considered: "*Why don't they give a chance to the women? Why [are] all the men required?*" In the same vein, Participant L also expressed her frustration about the lack of implementation of the quota system. She linked the under-representation of women in senior roles to the fact that the quota system has not been applied: "*There are eleven universities. If there was a quota system, I would like to know how many women are there in rector positions*". Her argument also challenged the university appointment system.

Participant F recognised that there is a lack of motivation in women. She claimed that "*there a[re] various senior department[s] where women can be promoted and kep[t] motivated, but we don't have that*". She advocated that selection should be based on people's qualifications rather than a political appointment. "*Based on the[ir] qualification[s], women should be given leadership opportunit[ies] rather than [being] selected based on relationships [or] political member[ships]*". Therefore, the quota system may be considered as being helpful with regard to women getting into positions; however, it is equally important to recruit capable women.

#### 5.2.2.4 Male dominance

The patriarchal culture within Nepalese society extends into the professional world, resulting in a masculine culture and boys' club. As the majority of the senior positions are occupied by men, this becomes a stiff barrier for women who want to progress into leadership roles. Some women give up, feeling that it is difficult to compete in that environment, whereas others fight for their existence in these positions. While discussing this situation, Participant H

revealed that male dominance is still predominant, despite the fact that some others had claimed that there is none. She also said that the patriarchal culture of society has resulted in subconscious biases in the work culture too.

The patriarchal society in Nepal provides men with the power to rule their household and society, which is an attitude that follows them to work. Participant I claimed that men prefer to demonstrate their supremacy at work; thus, they tend to dislike women whom they cannot be superior to (Longman, 2018). This was further detailed by Participant J, who claimed that "*men don't like women to lead. Without [any] apparent reason, they dislike ladies in that position. Men don't like to work under women*". She also added that this situation is not just present in the professional world; it follows from attitudes within the home. Stating her agreement with the same fact, Participant L said that men do not like women to be smart both in the private and professional worlds. She described this reality by using a famous Nepali idiom.

> ***Participant L:*** *"*Yeah, people don't prefer women to be smarter than men. Even in the household, if women are smarter than men, they [the men] don't like it. They call it '*Pothi baseko*' [A Nepali idiom; it refers to women being 'over smart']"

Furthermore, Participant L stated that men are always looking out for an opportunity for themselves; therefore, there is no consideration made for women: "*As I have said before, our society is patriarchal. There [are] never enough opportunities for men themselves: no matter how much is [out] there, they are never satisfied*". In the same vein, Participant G mentioned that she has found men "*to be power-hungry*" and always "*seeking for the position – they want that chair*". She also mentioned that the impact of male supremacy in society can also be felt at work: "*You can feel a male ego in the working environment*". Additionally, she pondered the attitudes that are unfavourable towards women and that restrict them from development: "*Male dominance is one thing that definitely can pull back females from reach[ing] that [higher] position*".

Participant F also highlighted two major challenges for women: "*One is male dominance, and the other is political favouritism*". She also argued that despite the existence of research about gender equality in South Asian countries, there has been no progress made; hence, she claimed that undertakings have not been made as per the initiation made to encourage gender

equality "*Why can't they erase it?*" she asked. "*That means why they are not doing the thing they demand – [the thing] they preach*".

Male dominance is not just about male supremacy and negative attitudes towards women; it has also resulted in favouritism and more males being supported into roles than females. This was communicated by Participant C and Participant E, who discussed a recent incident and talked about the ratio of women in higher roles. Participant C revealed that: "*In Padmakanya Campus, which is a ladies-only campus, we wanted lady leadership and the senior management wanted it the same way, but because of different interference there is a male leader*". Participant E also disclosed that women are under-represented in senior roles and confirmed that most of the decision-making positions are occupied by men.

> ***Participant E:*** "For department heads and campus chiefs, there is more male nomination. What [other] example shall I explore? I [have] already shown [you] the name list where the ratio of females is small. We have one to two women department heads. We have some committees and [the] senate, [and] there are no women. There is not a distinct position for [a] female. The executive board is the chief board. There is a chain of passing the subject matter from executive board to senate. If the subject matter is not approved by the board, it is forwarded to the senate. So, we don't have females on the chief board as well as the council."

This information confirms that the majority of the senior roles are dominated by males. These findings also suggest that there is a boys' club and homo-sociability within the higher positions of these organisations. Therefore, the majority of the appointments are made based on a scenario in which men support other men.

#### 5.2.2.5 Gender discrimination

This is the other factor that causes difficulty in terms of women's development, and it may be the result of the masculine culture and related negative attitudes. Although male colleagues' negative attitudes and doubtfulness about female leadership verify the existence of gender biases, the participants explicitly confirmed the existence of gender biases by describing their experiences or describing what they have seen. For example, Participant F firmly declared that gender discrimination exists in higher education. She argued that men are considered to be powerful and that there is an attitude of "*[the] male knows everything. They can handle*

*things – administrative and academic, both [of them]*". She described an event where "*a man campus chief was appointed [instead of a] woman*" on a girl only campus, despite the fact that there had been a petition for a women chief. She viewed this as confirmation of the fact that "*gender discrimination is still there, somehow*".

Similarly, Participant G stated that she could not reject the notion that there is an element of gender discrimination when she reflected on the total number of women in senior positions in higher education: "*There have been cases of gender bias when I think about how many women are in a position*". She argued that women are good in terms of completing their duties but the way management reflects on them is completely different. Women's responsibilities towards the family are considered to be a high priority and management is of the opinion that they may not be available freely; therefore, they exclude women from opportunities.

**Participant G:** "The positive side of a woman is that they are more of a focused person when they are handed responsibility and don't wonder about. If I talk about myself, I have this department as my priority but sometimes when management [views the situation], they see it differently, as they see females [as having] more family responsibility and [so they] might not be readily available for work. For this reason, women are devoid of responsibilities [and] opportunities."

Participant B upheld that gender prejudice is mainly seen in large departments with high levels of competition. She further explained that she had not experienced it as a result of working in a small department; however, she disclosed that gender bias exists: "*I agree that there is gender discrimination. Although my department is small and we haven't got much competition, in general, there is gender discrimination in bigger departments*". She further claimed that the existence of a boys' club is another reason for gender discrimination. She added: "*Men ha[ve] a bigger group, and they discriminate [against] women*". Participant H also made a similar comment, saying, "*We can't deny that there is [a] gender issue. We might not accept it but it's there*". She revealed that getting things done by the administrative and finance department had proved tough for her and said that it gets even tougher if there are men in the position: "*It is difficult to get things done. Mainly, [in] the administration and finance department. They try to manipulate us. Especially, if there are men it is even worse*".

However, she also confirmed that her department has more women than men and hence it seems to have a good gender balance and no discrimination.

The main cause of gender discrimination is rooted in society, as it is where women are discriminated against – and this consciously or unconsciously is brought into the work environment. This fact was well-described by Participant I. Although she was brought with no gender discrimination, she reasoned that just being a part of society made you sense the existence of discrimination on some level. Furthermore, Participant, I argued that because men do not like women to be superior to them, there is no motivation for women to advance in their careers. She argued that the patriarchal culture creates feelings of arrogance and supremacy amongst men and that they do not want women to do well. She said, "*Our women leaders [are] not motivated based on [their] experience and capability. They [the men] don't want that. That's a [result of the] patriarchal society we have*". She described an occasion on which a female rector was once appointed as VC for only three months and was demoted to the rector. She felt that this example demonstrated the existence of gender discrimination: *"I thought our ma'am would be VC, but [it] didn't happen. She was capable and competent. Because she is only [the]* first [female] rector', *we always relate to her and talk about her*".

On the other hand, Participant J rejected the assertion that gender discrimination exists in higher education, saying that she had not sensed the existence of biases at her university. She instead claimed that there is the same criterion for men and women and that they will have to compete equally.

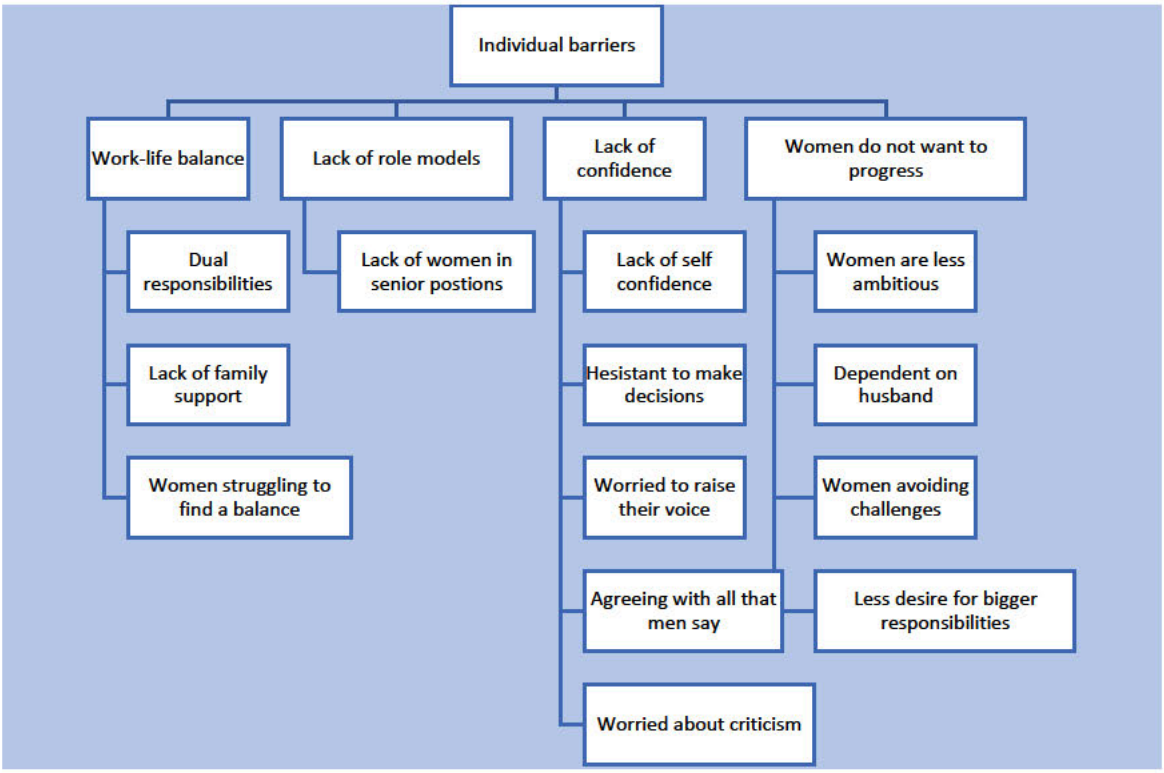
**Participant J:** "Being at university, I feel that have been lucky. I work with intellectually sound people. I have never sensed biases in this field. We have one criterion for both men and women. I compete equally with both men and women at work."

### 5.2.3 Individual barriers

Aside from the societal and organisational barriers, the participants also discussed the individual barriers affecting women's development. Various factors such as dual responsibilities, lack of family support, lack of role model, lack of confidence, lack of ambition, lack of desire to lead, etc. were discussed by participants, which are divided into

four major themes. All the major themes are listed as headings, and the subthemes associated with each theme are discussed under each heading.

Figure 8: Themes and Subthemes Related to Individual Factors




### 5.2.3.1 Work-life balance

The interconnection between work and family life appears to be problematic, and especially for women as a result of their obligations at home (Jones et al., 2018). Traditionally, women are expected to look after the family and household chores, which do not get smaller in number even if women work outside the home. In fact, women are expected to carry out both responsibilities, while men typically have just one responsibility – their work. Therefore, the majority of the participants agreed that women are far behind men as a result of their responsibilities at home. Participant J confirmed that the dual responsibilities for women prove difficult for women in comparison to men. She said that the patriarchal culture is a major reason for this struggle.

**Participant J:** "It all comes back to the patriarchal culture and how difficult it is for women. Women have double [the] responsibility than men and balancing work life and family life is complicated."

Moreover, she said that it becomes even harder for women who have a longer commute to work, as their family want them to be home on time to complete their household duties: "*Not every family will consider this matter [as an option] due to women [having a] responsibility towards the family*". Likewise, Participant C commented on the situation in Nepal compared with that in Western countries. She added: "*Family and children become [the] priorities of women when compared to Western countries where [the] responsibilities are divided*".

Moreover, living in an extended family is a common way of living in Nepal, and this appears to create more responsibilities for women. It is not just the children that women have to look after; they are also expected to take care of their in-laws and their requests. Participant C said that the situation can be challenging for women and that, as a result, it could impact on women's performance: "*When managing such situations, the[ir] performance can be impacted*". This was also mentioned by Participant E, who stated that women have dual responsibilities even towards the household: to look after the family and to look after the children. Therefore, she reflected that it is already tough enough for women to manage work and their responsibilities at home. Participant B also highlighted that women have to compromise in order to complete their studies and get published due to their family responsibilities, which could lower their confidence: "*Women are not able to continue with publications and further study due to family responsibilities, which is also a downside. Lack of study also decreases the confidence level*". She also presented her own story to describe how difficult it was for her to convince her husband during the early days of her career; however, she managed to reach an agreement with him.

Participant F also discussed the fact that women are impacted due to their responsibilities at home and criticised men for not supporting women when it comes to sharing duties: "*Women's responsibility towards the house has impacted the women. Men won't take any responsibility*". She also asserted that some women are tactful and that they can work around this situation, whereas some are not so tactful, so they have to leave their job while the others continue to fight the battle. Participant D argued that it is down to women to balance their work and family lives. She opened up about her struggle and argued that if women want to work and balance this with their family life, then they can easily do it. Her argument was that some women actually prefer to stay at home.

**Participant D:** "I was married, and my husband was the breadwinner. I could have easily stayed home too. But I thought it was important for myself to do better, hence I decided to [enter] further education. If every woman thinks this way, I don't think there will be any issue."

Participant A reasoned that she was able to manage her work and family life by prioritising. She explained that she had her family as a priority and would complete her duties for the household before going out to work. She found that it helped her in creating harmony: "*Before leaving my home, if I have cleared all my household work, my mind stays clean all day. I know my job is to be out of the house most of the time but, being so, if I ignore my household work and [am] in the job all the time, everything will be messed up*". Although this can be used as an example of a woman balancing her home life and work, the situation can be different for every individual, and thus many will find it difficult to find a balance.

#### 5.2.3.2 Lack of family support

Family support is a very important factor for women's growth and progress. As previously discussed, Nepalese society considers men as the head of the family and the breadwinner, while it considers women as being responsible for looking after the family and home. This culture makes it difficult for women to go out and work. Hence, it is very important to have support from the family, as this helps women to continue with their professional work. However, many women are lacking that support from their family, which ultimately affects their education, work-life balance and also their career development. As testified by Participant G, a lack of support from the family can be a barrier for women: "*Family comes as a barrier and in-laws too create a barrier. Women need to complete their chores [and] finish their office work*".

Referencing different situations than higher education, Participant K summarised that the situation is bad everywhere. She elaborated on the situation of women who are not able to continue with their studies due to their responsibilities. This participant highlighted the importance of the family's and husband's support: "*It is important for the family and husband to support the woman, otherwise the woman will always be deprived [of education]*".

Participant C expressed her views about the fact that equal responsibilities are part of the culture of Western countries, while Participant F argued that Western culture will not work in

Nepal. She said, "*I think whatever is in place is appropriate based on that country. It is good in Western countries, but that system will not be good in here*" – the reason being the family structure, which is predominately that of a joint [extended] family. She added, "*We first need to think about the family structure. We still live in a joint family*". Interestingly, she also claimed that the situation is better in rural areas than in urban areas. Her main reason for this was the growing culture of having a nuclear family in urban areas. She said that women's involvement in work has increased but not men's support in helping women with the household chores. Therefore, she demanded structural reform.

> **Participant C:** "In urban areas, the nuclear family system has increased, and the number of] women involved with work has increased – although men are involved in work too. Men would go and eat out and hang out in the bar. But women have to finish work early, go home and cook, [and] look after children. How can women perform better [with] this burden? Men never offer to help out. There is no work division, no understanding and no mutual feelings shared. So I think we need structural reform."

Participant H also discussed the same situation, in which men are not supportive despite the fact that the husband and wife are both working: "*Husbands are not found to be supportive and helpful, and wives are having to look after the whole family [along] with regular chores*". However, Participant B believed that the argument could be settled by teaching husbands how to complete household chores. She talked about her own story to confirm this: "*It is important to learn to settle the argument by teaching the husband about household chores. My husband didn't know about preparing a cup of tea, but I used to teach him how to [make] one*". Although it was difficult in the beginning, she said her husband was helping currently.

On the other hand, Participant A argued that women should learn to balance work and family life on their own and not rely on a husband. She also claimed that being dependent on a husband will cause drawbacks while taking on leadership roles. This can be considered as a powerful argument, as not relying on a husband and being independent prepares women for taking on higher positions at work.

**Participant A:** "It is not good for women to fully depend on their husband after marriage. If they rely on their husband, it is difficult for them to take leadership positions."

Family support also relates to work-life balance issues. A lack of support from the family creates even more complications when it comes to balancing family life while remaining persistent in one's professional life. Therefore, family support plays a vital role in women's lives in relation to overcoming issues related to work-life balance.

#### 5.2.3.3 Lack of confidence and risk-taking attitude

While discussing the barriers to women's success, some of the participants discussed certain competencies that they felt were lacking in women. A risk-taking attitude is a critical part of decision making and bringing about change, and it also plays an important role in helping women to lead with confidence. Some believed that women are worried about taking a risk, whereas others argued that even though women are willing to take a risk, men at a higher level would not agree to do so.

Participant C found that women were worried about confronting others; as a result, they often settle for anything: "*We see a lot of female leaders agreeing to anything they are told without challenging them [the other person]*". A similar observation was also made by Participant F, who said that women just agree with whatever men say instead of challenging them when required. In addition, she reasoned that women are worried due to the risks associated with political concerns and that they suffer from a fear of success.

**Participant C:** "They [women] are a bit poor in risk-taking. They get worried that they might get promoted, so they are not willing to take risks. They have fears and that is due to politics. I find some women just agree [with] what men say in the group discussion."

On the contrary, Participant G argued that women are not raising their voices in order that a good working environment can be maintained: "*Generally, females don't prefer doing it [keeping silent] but to make a sound working environment you have to resort to it*". Although

she confirmed that she had raised her voice in some matters, she said that she would not get involved in a matter that was not related to her own work.

Participant D asserted that women themselves do not like to advance and to take any risks. She claimed that not taking risks means that women are going backwards:

> **Participant D:** "Women themselves do not want to come forward. They want to be laid back and wish to not take any risk, which makes them [go] backwards."

In addition, Participant A discussed the fact that women not only lack confidence but are equally behind when it comes to decision making. She emphasised that women should be aware that the decisions made in the professional world are different to personal ones: "*I think we [all females] must be very aware of the differences in our decisions made in family and these professional decisions*". Her reasoning was that women should be wise in the professional world and make judgements appropriately, unlike in the family.

Participant E said that she gets worried about making decisions when she is surrounded by men: "*I get agitated with risk-taking when there are more men*". She presented an analysis of the old and new generations and said that the new generation of women are doing better, as they are better educated: "*They [the old generation] give up while taking a risk but now the new generation is more educated*". Moreover, she found women to be sensitive: "*What I [have] found is females are easily hurt. They overthink about others*". She also compared women with men and said that women should learn to let go of things and should not overthink things either.

Participant L said that she had found that men at the senior level were not prepared to take risks, despite the fact that she was willing to. She described one of her own battles, where she was trying to take a risk to bring about some changes at the university but men at the higher level were worried about taking a risk and wanted to avoid possible stress and discrepancy with others. She also argued that she is focused on herself and does not worry about what others say: "*I also didn't find men as risk-taking. I would approach [them about] a change but some of them will not consider it. They try to avoid the risk, disagreement and any possible stress*". However, she also discovered that "*women aren't always wise enough to*

*make decisions*". Therefore, she felt that women tend to depend on others when it comes to decision making.

#### 5.2.3.4 Women do not want to progress

Some of the participants claimed that despite the existence of other barriers, it is also the women themselves who sometimes do not want to progress. Although family responsibilities, social pressure and political influence are considered to be factors responsible for demotivating women from applying for roles and positions, some of the participants were of the opinion that women should learn to push boundaries. On the contrary, some others argued that roles and positions are not sanctioned based on one's interests.

Participant E found that women are not interested in applying for promotions because they think that everything is politically influenced. While promotion and selection at universities is politically prejudiced, she found that men are more into networking and playing power games to secure a promotion, whereas women do not get involved in that. Although she considers herself an introvert, she encourages women to apply for positions.

> ***Participant E:*** "Females ha[ve] a mindset that university [life] is influenced by politics so what is the benefit of trying for the promotion. People keep on following the [relevant] channels and networking all day and night if there is a vacancy for any post. Men go for it and also make an effort to achieve it, but females won't do so."

In addition, she reasoned that women's responsibilities towards the home – on top of their work responsibilities – are keeping women fully occupied, which does not increase their confidence level. She argued that despite the fact that all women are aware of the political situation at university, they should be fighting for positions: "*I approach all females to come and be the part of [the] competition – to at least be the challenger*".

In the same vein, Participant D also claimed that women are not displaying an interest in higher positions. She referenced the quota system for women, but she said that not enough women are applying for the seats available. While she mentioned that the patriarchal society in Nepal has not been helpful for women's growth, she also insisted that women should learn to fight their own battles. She added, "*Women themselves do want to come forward. Talking about regulation, they say that 33% of spots are provided to women, but we have not seen*

*that many women coming forward. Women have to push themselves and fight for it to resolve issues like this*".

Participant B argued that other factors come into play even when women are interested in applying for roles. She discussed the influence of politics on the selection process and asserted that one should be politically involved in order to get into a position:

> ***Participant B:*** "To be honest, rather than me being interested there are other factors. We have a gender issue and political influence. It is not easy."

Participant F's statement also supported the argument made by Participant B; namely, that it is not about being interested, it is more about the political appointment system. She mentioned that she is keen on applying for higher ranking roles but that she would not get them as she is not involved in any political party. She said, "*We don't get a role by applying or showing interest. We have political interference, and it depends on which political party membership one has*".

While some successful participants claimed that they would not get the role despite being interested, others suggested that women are demotivated and are slowly giving up. Although various factors are considered to be the problem causing women's demotivation, the findings indicate that women are starting to lack the desire to progress further.

#### 5.2.3.5 Lack of role models

Just as women's representation in higher roles is low, the lack of role models is also evident. Some of the participants found that it was difficult for them to engage with the possibility of moving into a higher role due to the lack of role models. They revealed that this is a barrier to their progression.

Participant L revealed that she had no role models to relate to and hence she could not imagine herself reaching a high level: "*I never thought I would reach here. I had no role model to relate to. I was not very ambitious*". But now that she is in a senior position, she considers herself as a role model to many and is aware of the fact that her failure could damage the hopes of other women following her path. She said, "*They can relate themselves*

*to be[ing] in this position [on] seeing us here. So, those women who have successfully reached that position shouldn't fail in their leadership*".

Participant F also sensed that there was a lack of role models in higher roles. She also expressed her view that having more women on board will help to encourage future generations. She compared higher education to other sectors where women's representation is slightly higher and suggested that the same should follow in higher education too: "*We haven't got many women in good leadership roles. If a woman is promoted to a higher position, the other generation[s] can see and take it as an example*".

In the same vein, Participant A also said that the lack of role models is a barrier for women's growth. She discussed the influence of having a role model and the impact it has. She revealed that there were significantly low numbers of women in a certain position and that it started changing soon after a female rector was appointed: "*After her recruitment, [there was] a good sign of increasing numbers*". However, she argued that women should be equally capable as men and not just be making up the numbers, in terms of being hired to meet certain quotas.

Participant D not only claimed that the absence of women is related to a lack of role models; she also said that less-educated women are getting into leadership roles. She reasoned that due to the improper use of the quota system, the right candidates were excluded while women with no competencies were brought forward.

Having women who are not capable enough in the higher positions can spread negative impressions, which can affect aspiring women leaders. While the lack of women in higher positions results in risks associated with a lack of role models, which is considered as being a barrier for women's progression, it is also equally important to have women in higher positions who are competent enough.

## 5.3 Strategies and factors facilitating women's progression

The participants discussed their journey of struggle and the strategies that helped them succeed in leadership roles.

### 5.3.1 Determination

As the situation with regard to women succeeding in higher education is very challenging in Nepal, one cannot progress and sustain oneself in the role without a strong will and determination. The participants shared their own stories, in which they testified that they would not have been in those positions if they were not determined.

Participant B described that she had to face failure a few times before getting into the position she is currently working in. Although she was mindful of power games, she stated that she stayed determined and kept trying until she got the role.

> **Participant B:** "We had more candidates than the [number of] available position[s] and that also involves the game of power. But I kept trying – two to three times – and I am here today. You need determination first. One should have the determination to develop and progress higher."

Similarly, Participant E also disclosed that she was rejected multiple times but that she did not give up. She worked hard to earn her role. Therefore, she suggested that one should face up to the competition but stay determined to be successful: "*I was rejected two to three times but still I didn't accept the failure. You need to face the competition*". She mentioned that she offered counselling to women to help them to stay determined but she found that women are sensitive about someone commenting on them. She also asserted that women need to overcome their sensitivities by learning to ignore others and continuing to work towards their goals. She strongly stated that having little determination would result in rejection and refusal.

> **Participant E:** "If you have a weak [sense of] determination, females are rejected and thrown out."

A story of failure and staying determined was also shared by Participant F. She revealed that she could not get into the position she wanted despite ending up in the second position after the written exam. However, she knew her worth, and she was determined to get the role. She

applied again, and she was selected: "*Despite my scoring [in the] second position in the written exam, I was rejected. But I [tried] again and I got through*".

Participants G, H and L all discussed their individual stories of struggle and how staying strong-minded helped them progress. Participant G shared the story of her battle of balancing her educational and professional careers and told of how her determination helped her to accomplish both. Likewise, Participant H also discussed how frustrated she was when she could not get the job she wanted due to the lack of opportunity. However, with patience and willpower, she managed to get into the role she wanted. In addition, Participant L explained how she was determined to reach her goal and how she used to work hard and have fewer hours of sleep: "*I was always determined to work hard. I would sleep three hours and work towards the goal. I always considered [my] career first*".

In addition, Participant C asserted that women need to be mentally and physically determined when working to pursue a particular role. As discussed previously, women have to face negative comments from family and society if they cannot fulfil all their duties at home; therefore, she advocated that women should make the arrangement at home and with family before taking up the role. She stated that women have to compete with men by being ready and determined to take up the challenge: "*Importantly, they need to have willpower*". She also referenced the negative comments that women have to deal with while trying to be determined, and she mentioned a few factors that can help women in moving forward.

In the same vein, Participant K considered that willpower and the willingness to work are required for progressing into the desired position. She said, "*There needs to be willpower and some sort of internal will for things to work out*". Participant I also talked about being determined to prove oneself. She argued that although other people can have a negative attitude towards women, if women are determined about reaching their goals, then nothing can stop them.

While the majority of the participants shared their stories of failure and success, it was evident that the women who stayed determined despite the challenges they were facing managed to get into the role they wanted. It was also apparent that one would not get into such positions without a strong mindset, especially in the context of the higher education sector in Nepal. Therefore, a determination can be said to be a successful strategy that is used

by female leaders in order to help them to stay positive and ambitious, while also helping them to overcome any negative comments they face.

### 5.3.2 Dedication and quality work

While discussing the many barriers to female leadership, which can be very challenging at times, some participants mentioned that they considered that working hard with dedication and producing quality work helps women to thrive despite the challenges they face. They believed that their dedication to their work helped them to progress.

This was acknowledged by Participant L: "*My quality work, I will say [was a factor]. The way I was dedicated to the work – that helped me*". She also talked about not getting involved in politics and said that working hard with dedication helped her to stay focused on her job; thus, she cared less about negative comments. Although she argued that it cannot guarantee a position instantly, this is the main mantra to follow: not focusing too much on the position and doing quality work with dedication will eventually pay off.

Similarly, Participant H also emphasised her belief that focusing on her work and performing it with sincerity helped her progress. Although it took a bit of time for her to succeed, she believed that working with sincerity helps women to be less worried and puts them in a strong position to succeed.

> **Participant H:** "I ask people to do their work, [to] not talk about other people and be sincere, and they will achieve what they want one day. I believe that from my incidents [own experience]. As I said, if you are sincere, they can't do anything, and you don't have to get worried."

In the same vein, Participant J revealed that it took her twenty-two years to get into the position she is in now. She found that working hard and her accomplishments certainly helped her, and she advised other women to follow this strategy too: "*It also took me twenty-two years to get here. Despite family responsibilities and obstacles, they [women] should try hard to accomplish the task and certainly one day they can get there*". She argued that the new generation of women is not working hard enough in order to meet their potential. She claimed: "*This generation of people is not hard-working, though. They need to focus on study and work hard*".

Likewise, Participant G believed that one can achieve anything if one is committed to one's work. She also discussed some other contributing factors, but above all, she reasoned that with dedication towards one's work and by making a positive contribution, one can be successful. Similarly, Participant D also considered quality work to be the way forward. She mentioned that she will stand a chance of getting into higher roles if the university becomes free of political influence; if that happens, her work and performance will be a factor that will be considered when she applies for a promotion: "*We all get that chance. It is based on our work performance*". In addition, Participant I said that being competent, along with dedication towards one's work, can be beneficial when it comes to proving oneself: "*Working hard and being competent [means that] every time you can prove yourself – like, '[this] who I am'*".

Participant E also agreed that dedication to completing quality work was important and reflected on her way of delivering quality work. She clarified that work should be done correctly by following university policies and established systems. She also said that work should be performed with fairness, avoiding any kind of discrimination, and by maintaining enthusiasm.

A similar assertion was also made by Participant C, who also believed in performing one's work professionally and being neutral: "*We must be impartial in what we do as leaders, as we have been given this responsibility by the government and we know our job description well. So we must conduct ourselves with the utmost professionalism*". Additionally, Participant K viewed time management along with hard work and dedication as being vital: "*You have to be honest; you have to be dedicated – [do] not just use the power but get involved and execute [your tasks] well. And time management is key*". She also advised women to be self-disciplined with respect to managing time and looking out for various options through which to manage family life so that one's focus could be retained at work.

### 5.3.3 Confidence

Along with determination and dedication, confidence is another essential element for success. As mentioned by the participants, confidence helps in overcoming the challenges that are related to gender stereotypes, negative attitudes and work-life balance. The participants also mentioned that confidence has helped them to prove themselves, make informed decisions and challenge the system. The participants also believed that women with a lack of confidence are easily swayed by others, which impacts their decision-making abilities.

Therefore, developing confidence was emphasised as being one of the strategies that the participants considered helpful in overcoming challenges.

Participant F and Participant J both talked about the necessity of women having confidence, especially when it comes to overcoming various challenges. Participant J said that one should be confident about oneself and learn to prove oneself through one's communication and actions. By accomplishing this, Participant J believed that one could overcome challenges. She mentioned that confidence starts at home and does not come just from work.

> **Participant J:** "All women should be confident and prove themselves based on their capability either [through] work or [their] voice. By doing this, I think we can overcome any kind[s] of challenges. It starts from our home too – not just the work. Develop confidence! One should have confidence in themselves. Work[ing] hard with sincerity is essential. This factor helps us in developing further."

Participant D claimed that leadership is about being confident and making a decision based on one's own judgement. She maintained that "*leadership rel[ies] on how capable you are*" and linked this to the decision-making process to describe the capabilities required. She found that being bold and making decisions with confidence aided her in presenting herself as a capable leader; therefore, she had not experienced negative attitudes from her male colleagues. She also revealed that preparing herself before getting involved in any kind of discussion enabled her to establish herself as being a confident person.

On a related note, Participant L also revealed that her strong character and bold attitude has been the reason that no one can look down on her. She revealed that people have a negative attitude towards female leadership but that she is determined and confident to prove them wrong. She referred to herself as being "bold" and expressed her dissatisfaction with how the term is mainly used to describe women's appearance and fashion sense. She argued that the term should rather be used for women who take bold decisions. She also strongly stated that she would not compromise by accepting any lower positions if she was offered a place at any other universities.

***Participant L:*** *"*People are criticising women in that position. But I am a very strong character, so I never let them do that. I'll prove this [by] sustaining [myself] in this position. No one could look down on me, even senior positioned men. Bold is not a term that should be defined based on their [women's] appearance or fashion. I think I am bold based on what kind of job I do. Another thing is, I will also not go anywhere as a second person. I want to be the first person in any organisation."

Participant I said that she views herself as being a confident woman and described how she raised her voice against the policy-making system at her institution. She believes that women are capable of anything if they can have confidence in themselves. However, she also claimed that women are emotional when it comes to decision making: "*You know, we say we women are rational and emotional. [We] shouldn't be guided by that softer side, such as emotion*". Instead, she suggested that women should be strong when it comes to decision making.

Moreover, Participant A articulated the fact that women who lack self-confidence and consider themselves as feeble are more likely to be dominated: "*What I feel is if you think you are weak [because] you are a female, you always will be dominated*". She claimed that women being selected through the quota system rather than through competition make other women sympathise with them. She stated that she does not want to be pitied but rather wants to be accepted for her confidence: "*I always say to them that I don't need sympathy as a woman. It gets on my nerves when [they] ask me to occupy [a place through the] women's quota [by] just giving me sympathy as a woman*". Here, she argues that the quota system is not aiding women but making them weak. Hence, she said that "*there won't be such a problem if you have self-confidence*".

Participant B was of the view that the gender issue will not come to an end; therefore, she believes that confidence helps women to keep moving in such an environment: "*[The] gender issue keeps going and we can't stop [it]. However, women should continue to keep going forward with confidence*". She felt that the support of one's husband and family is essential for women. She also stated that being confident and a good communicator assists women in achieving success.

The participants described how being confident helped them in raising their voices, making good decisions, proving themselves and overcoming negative attitudes. This confirms that

confidence is a key strategy when it comes to overcoming difficulties. Moreover, the participants also recommended that women should learn to believe in themselves and take firm decisions, thus proving themselves to be capable leaders.

### 5.3.4 Networking

The participants understood that good networking is an essential factor for career progression. Most of them mentioned that they are active in networking and that it has proven helpful for their success. As discussed previously, with regard to the influence of politics and power in the higher education sector, it was considered important by the participants for women to be involved in networking. In addition, the participants also commented on the fact that having supportive colleagues always makes work easier, so it is necessary to have good networks with one's colleagues too. Some of them also discussed the fact that networking outside the workplace is also essential for personal growth.

Participant A discussed the importance of networking. She said that she has been actively involved in networking and that she coordinates with others at a high level. She also expressed her view that one should not wait for others to start networking or start coordinating one's efforts with those of others: "*I am very active. I do have strong coordination and networking. I don't feel I have any issues with networking and coordination in myself. You should not be waiting for someone to do it for you*". Similarly, Participant C also discussed the significance of networking in the present situation. However, she felt that networking should be done with like-minded people who share similar interests and should be done at a professional level.

> **Participant A:** "In the present context, networking is vital to make sure that people with similar interest[s], abilit[ies] and capabilit[ies] can network and help each other. Also, people can get presented with opportunities based on networking and connections too."

However, Participant C did not approve of the kind of networking that is purely done for favouritism. Although networking provides one with more opportunities, she warned that it may not always provide the right opportunity for the right person: "*Doing that, not always the right people get the right opportunities despite the fact that networking is a good thing*".

Participant E confirmed that she has benefitted as a result of her networking. She emphasised the importance of mixed networking and said that she believes that women are not discriminated against when it comes to networking. She understands that networking also helps when it comes to overcoming one's limitations and that it helps in relation to improving oneself. Therefore, she insisted that education alone is not enough for women to grow: "*Yes, networking works. Education alone is not enough: you have to build networks. Facilities given to the department head are equal, and there is not any discrimination for females*". Participant K also talked about being actively involved in networking. She said that being part of a network could bring about mutual benefits: "*I am very active [in networking], and I think it is important. So a lot of doors open through networking – [for example,] if someone can help me or if I can be of any help. Therefore, it is quite important*".

Participant H acknowledged that not engaging in networking had proved disadvantageous for her. She compared herself with her friends who were active in networking and said that those friends progressed a lot faster, whereas it took quite a long time for her to get into the role she wanted. She regretted ignoring the importance of networking back then.

> **Participant H:** "I can give you my own example: I studied till I was twenty-two, twenty-three, and got married straightaway. I was really young. Back then, it was all about references and connections for jobs, and you could go a long way with good connections. Some of my friends, who were not as competent as me, have done well and made quick progress in their careers with the support they got. But I got stuck in [the] teaching profession. For ten years, I just carried on teaching and sometimes I questioned myself [about what would have happened if] I had followed the same path."

Although Participant G considered as herself being about average with regard to networking and making connections, she believes that networking is a crucial factor for career progression and that one cannot get into higher positions without it. In addition, this participant also thinks networking should be developed widely and globally. In the same vein, Participant J also said that networking is a key factor for making progress and argued that it should be extended comprehensively: "*Networking is important. We can't progress without networking. We have been building [on] networking, not within the country but also globally*".

In addition to saying that she had not kept up particularly well with networking, Participant B said that she believes in the importance of networking. She expressed her desire to be in a professional group and emphasised the need for more people to be a part of it: "*I think it is important. Being busy with work, I have not managed to keep up with it. I would like to be in politics. I think we need more people to [be] involve[d] in this*".

On the other hand, Participant I argued that networking is not relevant in an educational setting when it comes to getting a promotion. She argued that one should stand out in relation to the role rather than as a result of networking. She also mentioned that her PhD was good enough to get her into the role and that she did not need to do any networking. She claimed that networking is only important for entrepreneurs.

### 5.3.5 Family support

A lack of family support was a major barrier for women's progress. The participants shared their stories, which proved that it can be very difficult for women to take up a role without family support. There are also other factors such as work-life balance, social role expectations, early marriage and childbearing, and gender-stereotyped societal perspectives – all of which are considered to be barriers for women. The participants clarified that family support can assist in overcoming these issues. The participants also discussed how having an educated father or mother made a difference in their education and consequently in their career development too. Some of them also discussed the positive attitudes of and support received from their husband and in-laws with regard to their studies and work.

Participant D explained that the support of her family and friends helped her to get her educational qualifications. She explained that it was not easy for her to continue her studies after her marriage and as a result of having to look after the kids; however, she managed to complete her studies due to the fact that she had a supportive husband: "*While I was studying, I [had] kids too. At that time, my husband was doing a PhD as well as teaching, and he insisted [I should] study – and respecting his thoughts and encouragement, I studied*". She advocated that men and women should share responsibilities and work together by helping each other. Moreover, she also opined that children should be taught about shared work from an early age, thus creating positive change: "*To bring [about] this change, we have to clarify this concept to our children from a young age*".

A similar story was also shared by two other participants. Participant B found it difficult to continue with her studies after getting married at an early age and having children to look after. However, she received support from her family and in-laws, which helped her to continue with her higher education. While telling her story, she confirmed that family support is crucial: "*Family support is also key for women's progression. Without good family support, you cannot go out and express yourself*". Similarly, Participant C also said that she received good support from her family, husband and in-laws, who never argued with her about her desire to continue with her studies and to take on responsibility.

**Participant C:** "From my family and in-laws, I have had the support I have needed before and after marriage. As my husband is also a government official, he had an idea [about] sharing responsibilities and so did the in-laws. He never opposed me going out to study and tak[ing] responsibility."

Participant G claimed that women are capable of anything but said that family responsibilities could force some women to compromise. However, she said that her situation was fortunately different as a result of having a supportive family and in-laws who never questioned her about her whereabouts: "*[I was] lucky in terms of [the fact that] my family was supportive as well as [having] support from [my] in-laws. There was no restriction [when] it was a late night from work. But reasons like family obligation will force you to compromise*".

In addition, Participant H stated that she had a very easy start due to the fact she was from an educated family. She never experienced gender discrimination in her family and was supported as she undertook her education: "*On my side of the family, everyone was educated, with my grandfather on mom's side being a professor. In fact, there was no disparity between males and females, and the family used to be happy when I needed to go to do fieldwork and training, and they thought it was a learning process*". Participant K also considered herself lucky for not having had to face any kind of gender discrimination. She confirmed that having an educated mother made a difference in her life, as she was always supported. She said, "*Fortunately, I am very proud of my mother, who was a graduate herself, and I am here only because of her. There's a very little number of families that support their daughters*". She also claimed that "*if the mothers are educated,[then] their daughters become educated too*".

While talking about her slightly different experiences, Participant L mentioned that although she used to do all the household chores, she received good moral support from her family with regard to her work. She said, "*I used to do all the household work like other women, but I [also] used to get all the moral support from my family regarding my profession. That helped for my career progression*".

### 5.3.6 Support from colleagues

The participants considered support from colleagues as a vital factor for progressing and sustaining themselves in the role. Having a positive attitude makes a difference in daily activities; therefore, the participants emphasised the importance of having a supportive colleague and how much this helped them. Participant A stated that her colleagues were so supportive of her leadership that she did not even have to initiate the conversation about her promotion. She said that everyone supported her being in a leadership position: "*I did not even realise that my colleagues wanted me to take the leadership position. I did not initiate [it] myself, so I don't know much more about the challenging factors*". She described that she was later invited to discuss the potential for her taking on a higher role and was given the role. She felt that support from her colleagues helped her to reach this position, along with other factors: "*My colleagues and family members supported me to reach the position. So did my confidence and boldness*". She also asserted that no one objects to her decisions and that it has been an easy journey for her: "*There is no problem. In fact, I call them [my co-workers] and ask [them] to make a comment if there [are] any, and I also focus on [the] equal participation of every colleague here*".

Participant G strongly believes that supportive colleagues help one to overcome challenges. She stated that the whole country is in a transitional phase, and things are changing every day; therefore, it is important to be surrounded by people who work in your favour: "*If your colleagues are not supportive, you may not get the result [...] you're expecting. A strong team can easily outnumber challenges*". Furthermore, she added that when colleagues are supportive, it makes it easier to make decisions, and this motivates her to do better: "*Once you have a good team, then you become strong*". Participant I also declared that her colleagues have been supportive: "*I can see that all of us[whole team] are helpful*".

Participant H also said that support from her colleagues was one of her success factors. She revealed that she had more colleagues supporting and co-operating with her, which outnumbered the rebels. Therefore, she confirmed the importance of having co-operation

from colleagues. She also discussed the fact that it is important to receive help from higher-ranked officials. She mentioned that she has been receiving good support and appreciates the prompt responses she has been receiving.

> **Participant H:** "I would say the support from my colleagues and my sincerity ha[ve] helped me. I have come this far due to the team support. Otherwise, I couldn't have. There were rebels too, but I had more support."

Participant J had a slightly different experience: she found that people were slowly starting to show a positive attitude towards her, which she said was motivating her: "*In this matter, as women, we work sincerely, so I have been appreciated. People have slowly accepted me [more] positively than before. So I have been feeling motivated*". Meanwhile, Participant L mentioned that women are not perceived positively, so she has been working to empower women: "*I support women and believe in empowering them. People here don't listen to women. I help them with their work*".

### 5.3.7 Education and knowledge

Nepal still has a culture of distinguishing a person's capabilities through their education level and certificates attained. As a Ph.D. is the standard qualification required to progress into higher roles in the academic sector in Nepal, it is important for women to be qualified to the standard level to compete for positions. This was confirmed by the participants, who shared their stories of success by highlighting the importance of education. Out of 12 women participants, 11 had a Ph.D. qualification, which shows that the level of education contributes to women's success. Some of the participants also discussed the fact that their level of education aided them in building confidence.

Participant G was strongly of the opinion that without education there is no prospect of progress. She believed that education is important for women's growth. Moreover, she claimed that qualifications are the key factor considered when it comes to being promoted; therefore, she felt that one does not even become eligible for promotion without good qualifications.

**Participant G:** "Without qualification[s], you won't get any promotions too. Qualification[s] definitely matter. Education is very pertinent when it comes to women's development."

Participant I stated that having good qualifications made her confident and helped her to grow further: "*I mean, when you have additional degrees then you become confident in your work, and you will move on*". Even though she had faced some professional challenges, she instead used these as an opportunity to prove herself. She found her qualification was the biggest strength with regard to helping her to succeed in positions wherever she has been working. Participant B also stressed that education is crucial in the Nepalese context. Additionally, she also discussed the significance of having good information in various areas. She found that having knowledge about other social subject areas helps women to get into the conversation: "*Knowledge about all sectors, understanding what is happening in politics, urban areas, rural areas. That keeps women updated for everything [so they] can debate with people*". In the same vein, while sharing her own success story, Participant K said that a good qualification helped her to get into her role. Moreover, she also disclosed that the kind of educational environment one comes from makes an impact: "*After [my] master's, I did a job in this university. In those days, there were very few people with a Music degree, and especially a master's. I got an opportunity fairly easily and have been involved with the university ever since*". Participant F also cited education as one of the major factors that helped her to get into her role. She said, "*It was purely based on my education, my experience and seniority level [that] I got into this level*".

Similarly, Participant D learnt that being well educated made her distinctive from others and helped her to get into the role: "*There were less educated people so it was, in fact, a little easier for us*". However, she finds that the situation is very challenging for the women in this generation even though they are educated: "*Nowadays, regardless of their level of study, people have to face lots of challenges*". While discussing qualifications as a crucial factor, Participant J argued that there are only a few women with the highest qualification in the academic sector: "*The main hurdle in the Nepalese context is [that there are] very few women with [an] academically sound qualification, such as Ph.D. level*". As the participants revealed their success stories, it was apparent that education was one of the key factors behind their progress. This fact is indisputable, as the first criteria for selection for promotion

are one's educational qualifications. Moreover, education provides women with confidence and makes them eligible to apply for positions.

To conclude, the female leaders of Nepal discussed various personal strategies and other factors that proved to be supportive in relation to overcoming leadership barriers. The experiences shared by female leaders demonstrate the practical application of these strategies and how these supported these women in overcoming the various barriers they were experiencing in their leadership journeys. The following section presents the suggestions made by participants with regard to inspiring more women to enter into leadership roles in the Nepalese higher education sector.

## 5.4 Participants' Suggestions About Inspiring More Women to Enter Into Leadership Positions

Along with discussing the barriers and the supportive factors, the participants also suggested some of the factors that must be considered to help women progress into leadership roles. They spoke about the amendments required in the government's plan and policies, the obligation of the right platform for women's development and the need for university support.

The majority of the participants discussed the fact that government plans and policies must support women. Participant D said that it was important for the government to support the health and education of women: "*[The] government should take responsibility for health and education*" and advocated for social reforms to be initiated by the government. Similarly, Participant K expressed her concern about potential future female leaders migrating abroad for their education and not returning; therefore, she urged that the government should come up with a plan for promoting women's education in Nepal. Meanwhile, Participants F, J and E said that the government's quota system (33% of seats are reserved for women) motivates women and creates opportunities: "*These kinds of reservations help to create a space for women and encourage women into the role. It's important in Nepal*" (Participant E). This suggests that the government should focus on the proper implementation of these programs. In the same vein, Participant L also felt that the quota system was a potentially good thing but she insisted it to be used in a suitable manner by hiring capable women. She said that when implementing a quota system there should also be a focus on quality.

***Participant L:*** "I think a 33% quota system is good but needs to focus on quality. Capable candidates should be selected for the post. Universit[ies] should come up with a plan to hire a qualified candidate."

Although the quota system is considered to be a good initiative, the participants disputed its use and the extent to which it is helping women to progress into senior roles. The participants expressed their dissatisfaction about the way it has been implemented, arguing that women's representation is still low in key positions. Therefore, Participant H argued that it should be used to appoint women into senior roles instead. However, Participant I argued that the quota system should not be used by women who are capable and confident. She claimed that getting promoted through the quota system presented women as weak: "*I don't recommend [it] for that reason and because [the] quota system means women are accepting that we cannot compete with the males*". She instead insisted that the quota system should be used to appoint women who did not get a chance for a good education to help them to reach into leadership roles. Participant G also made similar comments about the quota system. She also said that the quota system might present women as being incapable: " *such reservation [quota system], which might portray women are less likely to move forward*". She instead urged the government to run a good education programme for women that especially targets women in rural areas. This statement from Participant G contradicts those made by Participants K and L, who advocated that a capable candidate should be promoted.

The participants debated the need for university support to help women get into higher roles. They indicated that promotions and the selection process for promotions should be based on a fair process. Likewise, a good education, training and preparing women for the role are the other factors discussed by the participants. Participant F emphasised the importance of a fair process, asserting that one should be selected simply based on eligibility rather than political favouritism, gender partiality or one-sidedness.

**Participant F:** "For this, the university is responsible [for] making plans and policies. They should make a fair judgement during selection and promotion. One should be selected based on their eligibility."

She described her experience of being on the judging panel and expressed how a decision can be easily influenced by other factors, rather than fair judgement. She highlighted that promoting someone based on unfair judgements could be demotivating for someone who is very ambitious. Additionally, she also advocated that the university should encourage capable women to enter into leadership roles by providing them with the necessary considerations. She said that a "*good education, job opportunit[ies and] vocational training*" should be provided. Participant L also demanded that universities should support capable women by creating a plan. She added: "*There are many women professors who are capable, and the university needs to focus on those women candidates*".

Participant F was of a similar view, and she insisted that the selection of women candidates should be based on eligibility instead of political preferences or relationships: "*Women should be given leadership opportunit[ies] rather than [being] selected [...] on the basis of relationship[s or] political member[ships]*". She also advocated for encouraging women to improve their qualifications. She suggested that universities should provide opportunities to women to improve their qualifications, along with other opportunities: "*Women should be given the chance to increase their qualification[s]. Universit[ies] should give that opportunity and open [up] that opportunity. They also need to increase the quota*".

Participant B and Participant C both talked about university support for women's education. Participant B said that the university should allocate a set budget to support women from rural areas by providing them with a bursary. She said, "*I think [a] scholarship programme for women [is needed], which [will] help to educate more women*". Similarly, Participant C also stated that women should be provided with scholarships and opportunities from the beginning: "*From school level, they should have access to opportunities [and] scholarship programmes focusing on women*". From a different perspective, Participant G suggested that juniors should be made ready to take up higher roles. She felt that it was important to prepare juniors so it would become easy for them to take on a higher role and responsibility. She said, "*I believe junior[s] should be made ready for the future. I have to hand over this position and develop other members as a perfect candidate*".

Overall, the participants stated that it was necessary to have appropriate plans and policies in place supporting women's access to leadership positions in higher education institutions. For that to occur, universities and the government were considered to be prime organisations in

which initiatives could be implemented to encourage women into leadership roles in higher education.

## 5.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the data gathered from the interviews with respect to the following issues, as suggested by the research questions of this study: (1) the factors causing barriers for Nepalese women's progression into leadership roles within higher education, (2) the strategies and factors that help female leaders to succeed in moving into leadership roles and (3) the steps that could be considered in order to enhance women's representation in the higher education sector and allow more women to advance into senior leadership roles.

The data in this study revealed various patterns in the participants' career development and established the impact of various individual, organisational and societal factors on their advancement. The study sample was comprised of only female leaders to discover the gender-specific issues related to their career development. When discussing the factors that impacted their ability to pursue their ambitions, and the barriers they have faced in both their personal and professional lives, the participants of the study described the various experiences they had faced while discussing the challenges they had encountered and the support they had received. In addition, when considering the different ways of improving women's development, with regard to them taking on leadership roles within higher education, the participants discussed various individual factors that impact aspiring female leaders and, most importantly, discussed the importance of support received from the university and government.

The next chapter will further analyse the research findings. An overall discussion of the findings is presented for each of the three research questions in the next chapter. The conclusion of the study is presented along with the contribution to the theory and practise, recommendation for future reference and limitation of the research.

# Chapter 6. Discussion, Conclusion and Implementation

## 6.1 Introduction

Studies related to female leaders in higher education in Nepal are still lacking. There is not enough focus being devoted to the current situation of Nepalese female leaders in higher education. Despite the complexities and challenges those women face in Nepal, there has not been any published research that is based on the lived experiences of female leaders in the Nepalese higher education sector. This research bridges this gap in the literature by providing insights into the experiences of successful female leaders by exploring their journeys into leadership, understanding the barriers they have encountered and investigating the success factors for female leadership. Moreover, this research also aims to share ideas and develop strategies that will inspire future generations of women to enter leadership roles in higher education.

While some women have managed to advance into leadership roles in higher education in Nepal, there are still various issues that act as significant barriers and obstruct women from making progress. Women are considerably under-represented in senior roles. The female leaders who have been in such positions stated that the path to these positions was not easy for them. The majority of the women have worked in the higher education sector for more than 15 years, and most of them have only recently been promoted to the roles they are in. Until now, only two women have managed to succeed in advancing to the role of vice-chancellor; however, one of them was only promoted for three months, and she was demoted to the position of rector afterwards. This scenario raises the question as to whether higher education institutions are contributing enough to supporting women's development.

As there is almost no research based on the experiences of Nepalese women who are leaders in higher education institutions, this study draws its argument and literature from other countries where research in the same field has been previously conducted. In addition, during the interviews, many of the participants compared their situation with the situation in Western countries; thus, literature from Western countries was beneficial in relation to verifying and understanding these perspectives. Studies conducted in Arabic and other Asian countries were also helpful with regard to gaining insights into the impact of cultural and social aspects, as Nepalese society still operates in a traditional way. Moreover, the majority of

Asian studies have called for more research in this area, thus highlighting the lack of research and the importance of conducting research in this area.

Hence, in light of the above, this empirical study draws on 12 Nepalese women academic leaders' stories of their career development, while considering social and cultural aspects relevant to Nepal. There was an imperative need to emphasise the significance of these individuals' voices with regard to the problems that affected them that they had faced in their lived experiences. The research questions gathered rich data that discovered the obstacles and enablers that impact Nepalese women academics' career advancement. Furthermore, the approaches recommended by the participants could be of great help in bringing about positive change in higher education institutions and empowering more women to pursue leadership positions.

This study was directed by the following research questions:

RQ1. What barriers are Nepalese women academic leaders encountering while progressing into senior roles?

RQ2. What strategies are Nepalese women academic leaders adopting in order to overcome leadership barriers?

RQ3. How can women's access to leadership positions be enhanced in the higher education sector in Nepal?

This chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapter in light of the main research questions. This chapter critically analyses and contextualises the findings against the backdrop of relevant theories (the gender organisation system approach, feminist theory, social role theory, role congruity theory, the glass ceiling and the leadership labyrinth) and with reference to the literature and findings of other studies in relevant fields. This chapter then emphasises the contribution made by this research to the study of higher education and also discusses its limitations. Finally, this chapter also advises on plans and policies that could be put in place to support women in higher education in Nepal and offers recommendations for future research. This chapter ends with a personal reflection on this research journey highlighting the challenges and learnings made along the way.

## 6.2 Summary of findings in the light of the theoretical framework

This study, which was informed by social role theory, role congruity theory and feminist theory, studied the reasons for female leaders' under-representation in Nepalese higher education and the barriers that Nepalese women leaders are experiencing, along with the strategies that successful women leaders are adopting to overcome leadership barriers. Social role theory provided validation to issues related to gender role expectations and their impact on women's behaviour and growth. In line with social role theory, the findings of this study confirmed that men and women in Nepalese society are strongly influenced by gender roles and the behaviours associated with these. Men are thought to be the supreme members of society and considered to be assertive, bold and strong, whereas women are viewed as being responsible for caretaking tasks. Gender norms seem to discriminate against women from an early age, which affects women's development throughout their lives. Social role theory provided guidance with regard to examining the multiple social and organisational barriers that women face.

Similarly, role congruity theory aided the researcher in investigating organisation-related issues. The outcomes of this study indicated that Nepalese universities are male-dominated. The findings suggested two major reasons for male dominance in Nepalese higher education institutions: a) the country's patriarchal culture creates a foundation for the masculine culture in universities and b) stereotypical views prevail, which consider men as leaders. Men have been given all the power and opportunities in Nepalese society, which makes them feel superior in the family and society, and this extends to organisations too. The participants in this study reported that women are not perceived well as leaders; they also indicated that the masculine culture is responsible for negative attitudes towards female leadership and that more men are supported into higher roles as a result of favouritism. Drawing on role congruity theory, it has been proven that women are expected to behave in certain ways, which are found to be contradictory to traditional leadership virtues, whereas the characteristics expected in men are congruent with the virtues associated with leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Newman et al., 2017). Hence, men are considered to be leaders whereas women face negative attitudes towards their leadership.

Feminist perspectives assisted the researcher in identifying the issues associated with women's under-representation in leadership positions in Nepalese higher education and uncovering the negative influence of patriarchy. Power and positions are given to men in

Nepalese society whereas women are restricted to a lower status. The participants in this study communicated the struggles they faced in relation to balancing their social obligations; that is, balancing their family and work life. The masculine culture and existence of a boys' club have been proven to be difficult for women wishing to extend their networking. Women seemed to struggle with conforming to expectations with regard to gender and leadership expectations, which places them in a double bind. Female leaders are significantly under-represented in Nepalese higher education, and they are constantly struggling to survive in a masculine environment. The researcher utilised feminist theory to uncover these experiences and the perceptions of female leaders.

In line with Soleymanpour et al. (2015), Johns (2013) and Wolfert et al. (2019), this study also confirmed the existence of a glass ceiling: some of the participants claimed that it was easy to get promoted up until the senior levels, where women's progress is particularly slow. Most of the participants had been recently promoted to their positions despite working for many years at the university. Looking at the latest report on the total number of teachers, female representation seems satisfactory. However, once women are at a certain level, various barriers come together to form a hard glass ceiling, and many women leaders are finding it difficult to break through. As a result, some participants stated that they might consider changing their careers. Whereas some others revealed the difficulties they encountered constantly in their roles in higher education validating the existence of leadership labyrinth. The participants of the study discoursed various strategies they had adopted to manoeuvre their way through the leadership labyrinth which is discussed in section 6.4 (page 183). Barriers discovered through the findings of the study are discussed in the following section in reference to the GOS framework where barriers are divided into the societal, organisational and individual barriers.

## 6.3 Barriers Faced by Nepalese Women in Higher Education

This is the first and main research question of this study, as this study set out to explore the factors that are responsible for women's under-representation in leadership roles in the higher education sector in Nepal. The barriers discovered from the study are categorised using the GOS approach: societal, organisational and individual. Barriers such as gender role expectations, the lack of support from family and society, the lack of organisational support, negative attitudes towards female leadership and the roles and responsibilities of women in

Nepalese society, along with lack of confidence and risk-taking behaviour, are discussed in this study.

### 6.3.1 Societal barriers

Social role theory and feminist theory uncover the problem found within the society and culture. As Nepalese society is dominated by the traditional and cultural belief that men are the supreme members of society (Basnet, 2011), there are role expectations and boundaries set for women. These have been proven to be difficult to abandon for even educated and highly skilled women in Nepalese society, which includes female leaders in the higher education sector. The participants in this study discussed various issues, which are listed below under the three key headings.

#### 6.3.1.1 Social expectations

The majority of the participants in this study confirmed that the role expectations and the patriarchal culture are the key barriers for Nepalese women when it comes to going out and working freely. The Nepalese social system is constructed on a patriarchal philosophy, which provides ultimate power to men and undermines women (Langer et al., 2019). The participants highlighted that women are expected to be involved in household chores and to look after the family, whereas men are considered the breadwinner. Although Sekścińska et al. (2016, p. 1) stated that "the social role of women is evolving in the direction of taking a profession, while increasingly men are taking care of the household", the findings of this study indicate that women in Nepal are expected to be involved in domestic work – which is viewed as a traditional practice – despite occupying senior positions, while there has been no change in the role of men. Therefore, this study argues that social role expectations persist in Nepal: men are viewed as being the leader of the family and women are discriminated against, as they must conform to expectations. This is also confirmed by social expectations and the gender-based role that the majority of women are home-centred, whereas men are more work-centred due to social role preferences (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As is the case in many Asian countries, men are considered as being the head of the family and the figure of supreme power, and this view is also persistent in Nepalese society, as is evident in the findings, Abalkhail (2017) and Huang and Aaltio (2014) found that cultural and traditional beliefs are deeply embedded in society, and these provide men with the power to rule the family and workplace. The participants explicitly mentioned that the patriarchal culture in Nepal has proven to be their main barrier. Upreti et al. (2020, p. 88) also stated that the

patriarchal culture in Nepal is evident in society and confirmed that "ongoing discriminatory practices [are] pervasive in the society including at the household level". Thus, due to the existence of patriarchal culture in households and societies, women continue to face discrimination when it comes to the power and position. In line with Morley and Crossouard (2015, p. 9) finding, this study also established that Asian societies have a strong message that "women should not be in authority over men", which is considered gender-appropriate behaviour.

Role congruity theory argues that social role division has prevented women from attaining equal power and positions as men (Manzi, 2019). As Shah and Shah (2012, p. 33) claimed that "women's participation in the public [sphere] and their access to senior leadership positions is defined by cultural and belief systems in a society", in line with those findings, the results of the study also reveal that power and positions in Nepalese society have been taken by men, while women have been pushed back to a lower status. The participants in this study also indicated that men do not like women to be in positions of power. Men's jealousy and fear of being overshadowed have led to many women being forced to stay at home. These findings agree with those of Yukongdi and Benson (2005), who claim that Asian countries are patriarchal and that men do not want women to be in superior positions to them.

In addition, the findings of this study also show that role expectations extend to women's lives after marriage and childbirth. Most of the participants discussed the expectations placed on women as daughter-in-law and a mother, which make it even harder for them to work outside the home. The findings revealed that women are expected to be committed to the household and to look after the children once they are married. A further novel finding is a power exerted by the mother-in-law in shaping a woman's career. As Luitel (2001, p. 102) cited that the mother-in-law holds the highest ranking among female members of the Nepalese household, while the "daughter-in-law is legally the authoritative mistress of the household without power and prestige", therefore the liberty of the daughter-in-law for the choice of work and working hours are subjective to mother in law's decision. The findings of this study suggest that the mother-in-law plays a great role in facilitating or blocking women's access to outside work and their ability to balance their work and family responsibilities. The participants who had an understanding and educated mother-in-law described the additional support they had from her with regard to their career growth, whereas those who had an uneducated and unsupportive mother-in-law said that this led to

added difficulties with regard to continuing their studies, working outside the home and even finding a balance between work and family life. Thus, it is clear that the mother-in-law has a great influence on a woman's career development. This led to another interesting finding of this study; namely, that a woman who experiences discrimination is likely to behave the same way as her daughter-in-law. Therefore, the destiny of a daughter-in-law lies in the interest of her in-laws: having a working and educated mother-in-law was found to be a supportive factor for a woman's career, while those without a supportive mother-in-law had to compromise and fit in with the family. These findings are in agreement with Arcarons's (2018) discovery of a positive link between women's employment status and the employment status of their partner's mother.

Eagly and Sczesny (2009) suggested that after childbirth women are expected to contribute more to the family and child. This was established to be the case in the majority of households in Nepal, where women have additional responsibilities after marriage and childbirth. Hence, it was found that women are less committed to their work responsibilities due to role expectations at home. This shows that Nepalese women are compelled to reconsider their careers in order to manage their responsibilities at home. This is in line with Adhikary's (2016) conclusion that marriage and motherhood are social obligations in Nepal that women have to follow; therefore, women are left with no choice between their career and their family life. Thus, it can be claimed that social role expectations and the patriarchal culture are prevalent in Nepal; these prove to be a difficult barrier when it comes to women's progression in their careers.

#### 6.3.1.2 Culture of early marriage and childbearing

The issue related to the gender differences in Asian countries is often left unexamined in many female leadership barrier studies. It is important to understand gender differences in Nepalese society and their impact later in growth. Therefore, a closer examination of the social construction of gender clarifies the interactions between cultural factors and child growth that can lead to differences in perceptions of similar behaviours in boys versus girls. Therefore, this study focuses on how behavioural expectations in females in Nepal differed based on gender roles, gender discrimination, inequity, and treatment from childhood based on their gender identity. In Nepal, girls and boys are expected to contribute to society differently. It is acknowledged that girls are marginalised from birth, educated at lower rates, and many are forced to marry early in Nepal. The outcome of the study revealed that women

are forced into early marriage and childbearing, which adds more responsibilities to their lives from an early age. Women in Nepal are under pressure to get married at a certain age as "women may be more highly valued because they are tied to [the] valuation of virginity and childbearing" (Allendorf et al., 2017, p. 2). This contemplation is still prevalent in rural areas of Nepal as girls are forced into marriage soon as they reach their adolescent (UNFPA, 2021). Halim and Rivera (2020) disclosed that, on average, women in South Asia are getting married at the average age of 20, whereas men marry at 25, thus demonstrating the difference in expectations with regard to marital age based on gender. This was also found in this study: the participants discussed issues related to early marriage and childbearing where women are forced into early marriage, while men are considered to get married at the right marital age. Allendorf et al. (2017, p. 2) cited that "in patriarchal contexts like Nepal, men have greater control over their marriages and men's marriages are key to continuing the family line", which provides reasoning for the different marital ages for men and women. In line with Khokhar's (2018) study, this study also discovered that Nepalese society views motherhood as a crucial act that women must accomplish.

While the pressure to marry early is linked to the family, it has also been linked to the social pressures that families have to face. The participants described situations where families experienced pressure from society for not getting the daughter married at an early age. Hence, societal intervention and pressure could be reasoned as being the cause of family pressure on women to marry early. Moreover, societal expectations and perceptions of early marriage have also affected women's education. In Nepal, a man is considered as the person that takes the next generation forward, while a woman is viewed as someone to be married into other families; hence, she is not considered as a part of the family (Luitel, 2001). Therefore, women are forced into early marriage while men can devote themselves to their studies. This ultimately can generate an imbalance in the number of qualified men and women. Therefore, early age marriage can impact women's time for their studies because of additional responsibilities, which eventually means that they are not qualified enough for higher roles.

Additionally, the participants also asserted that young women are slowly dropping out of education due to marriage and childbearing issues. This statement was verified against the latest figures on the enrolment of women in higher education (as shown in the table below). The correlation between the statement and the data turned out to be positive, as young

women's enrolment in education is seen to drop significantly after bachelor's and master's degrees. This is consistent with Sekine and Hodgkin's (2017, p. 11) findings: "[the] strength of the association and the frequency of reporting of marriage as the main reason for school dropout are remarkable enough to warrant the conclusion that child marriage is the main driver of girls' dropping out of school in Nepal". Therefore, early marriage can be considered one of the main reasons for young women dropping out of college in Nepal.

Table 12: Higher Education Enrolment Percentage by Gender

| Level | Female (%) | Male (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Bachelor's | **52.8** | **47.2** |
| Master's | **48.7** | **51.3** |
| M.Phil. | **18.6** | **81.4** |
| Ph.D. | **15** | **85.0** |
| Total | **52.1** | **47.9** |

Source: Ministry of Education of Nepal (2018)

The participants also said that the situation is worse in rural areas, as social norms are enforced rigorously. A culture exists where young women are not even considered a part of the family and are seen as the property of other houses (because they get married and go into another family's home); therefore, girls are prepared for household chores rather than supporting themselves through study. This is also evident by Mbepera (2015) who revealed that parents mostly prefer to educate boys and often there is no preference for girls, as they are expected to get married early; therefore, educating girls is considered a bad investment.

Parsons et al. (2015) also established that girls who get married early have less decision-making power in the marital home, greater chances of dropping out and higher rates of illiteracy. When girls get married early, their chances of gaining a formal education become limited due to marital and family demands (Sekine & Hodgkin, 2017). This also restricts them from gaining formal training and experiences that would enable them to be productive member of their household and community (Parsons et al., 2015). As, Lowe et al. (2019) declared that early marriage has a significant negative effect on women's development;

consistent with that, this study also confirms that early marriage and childbearing are significant obstacles to Nepalese women's academic career progression. Therefore, the results of this study add to the existing literature on social role theory by confirming that the role expectation in Nepal encompasses the culture of early marriage and childbearing and creates an extra responsibility at home that limits women in their professional growth (Halim & Rivera, 2020; Yukongdi & Benson, 200; Shah & Shah, 2012), while early marriage is also responsible for young women dropping out of education, which impacts the overall number of qualified women in society (Mbepera, 2015; Sheikh & Loney, 2018; Morley & Crossouard, 2015).

#### 6.3.1.3 Prejudiced attitudes of society towards women

The current study also established the reality that there is a narrow-minded societal attitude towards working women. The findings show that gender-stereotypical attitudes start from an early age and that these differentiate between girls and boys. The participants stated that girls are expected to be at home on time and are not allowed to be out until late, whereas boys are free from all these restrictions. As established by Luitel (2001), the culture gets even tougher when a young woman gets married: rigid boundaries are set by her in-laws, who expect her to be home on time and to complete her household chores.

Additionally, it was also found that women staying out until late is not considered appropriate in Nepalese society and is often seen as a form of wrongdoing. The participants in this study reported that they often had to face criticism for getting home late. This indicates that one of the reasons that women are often hesitant in considering late working hours and taking on extended responsibilities is their fear of facing a backlash. This limits women's chances of being promoted, as women are seen as being incapable of performing their full duties. Furthermore, this study also found that women's interactions with men are not perceived well in Nepalese society. These kinds of social attitudes have held women back from developing. These findings tie in well with Halim and Rivera's (2020) conclusion that societal perceptions; that is, society's confined mindset about women, are not letting women consider moving beyond such boundaries. Similarly, Mahato et al. (2020, p. 56) observed that "success is contingent on many social, economic, cultural and educational factors that work against women"; therefore, this study confirms that significant changes in social awareness are required for women's growth.

In line with Koenig's (2018) discovery that women are expected to behave in a considerate way as a result of gender stereotypes, the current study also discovered that stereotypical perceptions within Nepalese society view women's behaviour as being sensitive, obedient and caring – and women are often expected to be patient with everything. These social expectations of women are widely adopted and communicated by families to their children. The findings showed that women who behave assertively may not be perceived well due to these socially constructed ideas. These findings are consistent with those obtained by Weyer (2007), Hassan and Silong (2008), Abalkhail (2017) and Zhao and Jones (2017) in similar studies which noted that social role expectation makes women and men exhibit gender-appropriate behaviour. Similarly, Weyer (2007) also found that gender role stereotypes are general principles about the traits and characteristics that are used to label men and women: women are considered homemakers, and there is a belief that women are emotional and sensitive to criticism (Hassan & Silong, 2008), while men are expected to be aggressive, bold and assertive. This can be challenging for women in male-dominated environments, where leaders' virtues are linked to masculinity. These results support the idea of the double-blind specified by Eagly and Karau (2002) and Broughton and Miller (2009), where women face confusion when trying to meet the norms set for men while following gender roleroles expectations. Thus, prejudiced attitudes within Nepalese society can be considered a barrier for Nepalese female leaders in higher education.

### 6.3.2 Organisational barriers

This is one of the major factors responsible for the creation of barriers to the development of female leadership. There are multiple associated factors within organisational factors that prevent women not just from getting into senior positions but also sustaining themselves in these positions. The role congruity theory and feminist theory guided the outcome of the findings. These factors are discussed below.

#### 6.3.2.1 Political involvement and unfair appointment

The findings of this study indicate that Nepalese higher education is hugely impacted by political intervention, which is predominantly evident in government-based universities. The participants revealed that a culture of favouritism exists, which overshadows competency in the selection and promotion process in the Nepalese higher education sector. As women are not as involved in politics as men, they are disadvantaged with regard to selection and promotion. In addition, favouritism has put more men into powerful positions: the majority of

the key political positions in Nepal are occupied by men. Although there is a provision of 33% seats for women in the Nepalese parliament, it has been argued that women are nominated only so that the quota of seats are occupied, rather than as a result of their capacity to contribute to the government (Rai, 2019). In addition, Rai (2015) mentioned that Nepalese women's involvement in political parties is nothing more than symbolic and claimed that male colleagues do not acknowledge women's discussions and debates. This was also confirmed by Upreti et al. (2020, p. 89), who noted that the impact of "women in the decision-making and constitution-building processes has been found to be limited". This is all facilitated by men in decision-making positions (Rai, 2019), which ultimately favours men in many aspects, including appointments in the Nepalese higher education sector. These findings are consistent with those of Morley and Crossouard (2015) and Ga Choi (2006), who stated that politics and power are seen as being dominant in the Asian context, which is impacting the higher education sector too.

Political favouritism and appointments are considered a power game in which networking plays an integral part. As discussed in the previous section, women are already struggling to work full-time due to role expectations; thus, finding time to get involved in networking is problematic and women are hugely disadvantaged as a result. Moreover, the current study found that the existence of homo-sociability in the political sphere restricts women from engaging in successful networking. These findings are consistent with Shepherd's (2017) and Balckmore et al.'s (2006) analysis, which suggested that the existence of homo-sociability in the selection process means picking people just like oneself.

The current study also discovered that the unfair selection and promotion process within the Nepalese higher education sector is due to political involvement. Despite the existence of capable women, it was suggested that men were appointed to senior roles by unfair means. Many examples were shared by the participants as they reflected on this unfairness. Amongst them, the key one was when a woman vice-chancellor was selected for three months and was demoted again to a rector position while a man was appointed to the vice-chancellor position. This story was discussed by several participants as evidence of the prejudices that exist in Nepalese higher education. These findings are in agreement with those obtained by Bouton (2015), Coleman (2009) and Mukolwe et al. (2016), which identified that the unfair selection and promotion process is one of the main barriers women are facing. They also reported that the recruitment process often favours men. Bouton (2015) explained that at a higher level,

recruitment, selection, hiring and promotion practices are informed by images of effective leaders that are stereotypically masculine. Additionally, Coleman (2009) claimed that organisations tend to appoint and promote those applicants who resemble the existing members of the organisation; as a consequence, organisations with more men in senior roles have very low numbers of women in leadership positions. This study further confirms the association between more men in senior positions and the lower representation of women in leadership positions.

#### 6.3.2.2 Universities are ruled by men

The results of this study indicated that universities in Nepal are under the influence of masculinity. These findings are consistent with Harley (2003), O'Connor (2014) and Zhao and Jones (2017), who claim that universities are ruled by men. The participants articulated that male dominance is more than male supremacy or negative attitudes towards women; the culture of supporting more men into higher roles than women is another example of this reality. This outcome is linked to similar findings, where senior positions are gendered as male, which produces a masculine culture (Broughton & Miller, 2009), and homosocial networks are favoured (Fletcher et al., 2007), which appears unfriendly and discriminatory against women (Morley & Crossouard, 2015; Alwahaibi, 2017). The impact of masculine cultures leads to forming obstacle for women in their career progression.

There are several possible explanations for this outcome. Firstly, it could be that the patriarchal culture forms a foundation for the masculine culture at universities. As men have been given all the power and opportunities in Nepalese society, making them feel superior in the family and society, this follows in organisations too. This finding is in line with Yousaf and Schmiede's (2017), who established that the patriarchal culture in higher education settings is responsible for women's lower representation in senior roles, regardless of education and qualification, and that organisations prefer to appoint men as the head. Secondly, there is a stereotypical view that considers men as leaders. Some of the participants stated that men are preferred as the head more than women in Nepalese higher education. This matches the observations in Orupabo's (2018) and Yousaf and Schmiede's (2017) studies, which noted that cultural and stereotypical views associated with power and authority are typically linked to men; hence, men are considered as being more competent than women. Therefore, the higher the position, the more prospects there are for men.

In addition, participants also testified that women are hugely under-represented in senior roles and that most of the decision-making positions are occupied by men in Nepalese higher education institutions which demonstrates the huge imbalance with regard to gender representation in higher positions, thus proving the existence of male supremacy and gender discrimination. This outcome supports Blackmore et al. (2006), Grummell et al. (2009) and Shepherd (2017), who rationalised that the masculine leadership model creates risks of uneven representation in senior roles, which results in greater discrimination with regard to gender and ethnicity, particularly in the higher education sector. Therefore, this outcome verifies that Nepalese universities are still largely gender-biased, which has proved to be a barrier to Nepalese women's chances of progressing into leadership roles.

In line with Soleymanpour et.al., (2015), Johns (2013) and Wolfert et.al., (2019), this study also indicated towards the existence of the glass ceiling as the majority of the participants claimed that it was easy to get promoted until the senior levels where the progress is particularly slow. Most of the participants were promoted recently to their positions despite working for many years at the university. Looking at the latest report on the total teachers, the female representation seems satisfactory. However, once women are at certain level, various barriers form a stiff glass ceiling, and many women leaders are finding it difficult to break. Hence, participants expressed about changing their careers instead.

#### 6.3.2.3 Negative attitudes towards female leadership

The attitudes of men towards female leadership have been discovered to be an impediment for women in Nepalese higher education, as the participants reported that they have been facing criticism of their leadership. There are a few explanations for this result. Firstly, it was claimed that men in Nepalese higher education institutions do not prefer women as leaders. As social expectations have created roles for men and women based on what they usually do and what they are expected to do – terming it a gender-based role (Zhao & Jones, 2017), it seems possible that role expectations have prevented Nepalese women from attaining equal power and positions to men (Manzi, 2019). This result is consistent with Sobehart's (2009, p. 53) claim that men's negative attitudes towards female leadership are a consequence of social role theory; namely, that "men are brought up to believe women cannot lead them". Islam and Nasira (2016, p. 112) also stated that: *"*[The] attitude towards women is based upon the general gender role perception of the society. Male-dominated economy and social structure often prefer male[s] as a perceived leader in critical condition[s]". Therefore, social role

theory and role congruity theory provide a justification for the prejudices towards women, which have been considered in several other studies (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Schwanke, 2013; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017; Zhao & Jones, 2017) and the consequences are that it is more difficult for women to progress into a career and to rise into leadership positions.

Furthermore, the outcome of the study also demonstrated that a male-dominated culture supports the socialisation practices that consider women inferior; hence, men do not like to be led by women. The reasoning for that is the culture of providing men with a sense of superiority over women is still prevalent in Asian countries (Zhao & Jones, 2017). The patriarchal culture provides Nepalese men with all the power to rule the household and this belief in male supremacy extends from the home to the office. As Yukongdi and Benson's (2005) and Yousaf and Schmiede's (2017) claimed that the patriarchal culture impacts the behaviour of men, who tend to behave as though they are superior everywhere. Therefore, the traditional view in Asian countries is that men do not want women to rule them (Yukongdi & Benson, 2005) which is also evident in Nepal.

Secondly, the findings of this study demonstrated that the masculine culture in Nepalese universities is responsible for producing negative attitudes about women's ability to be a leader. The participants stated that men looked down on them and had doubts about their ability to perform the work in the positions they were appointed to. In line with Zhao and Jones's (2017) observation, this study also found that a boys' club culture across workplaces has devalued diversity and challenged aspiring women's leadership abilities. Participants also communicated how men doubt women's ability to lead; this can be intimidating for Nepalese women, as they feel they have to prove their worth or else experience a constant backlash. These findings are in agreement with those of Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2016), Robinson (2015) and Alsubaie and Jones (2017) who conducted studies in the same field. Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2016) found that a male-dominated culture within the higher education sector influences daily practices, causing women to feel intimidated. In addition, Robinson (2015) revealed that women experience multiple difficulties when trying to prove themselves as capable leaders and their worth, and that they must meet many expectations. Also, Alsubaie and Jones (2017) mentioned that a masculinised organisational culture binds men together, which results in them disregarding female leadership. In line with these findings, it can be concluded that a masculine culture creates an extra burden for women when it comes to proving their worth and credibility as leaders.

It has been previously discussed in the literature that leadership is traditionally masculine and that the virtues of leadership are aligned with masculine attributes (Hentschel et al.,2019; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Universities have been based on masculinity (Harley, 2003; O'Connor, 2014), with most of the senior positions being occupied by men (O'Connor, 2014). Therefore, the findings of this study are equivalent to those observed in previous studies, which found that women have been pushed back and doubted with regard to their ability to lead as a result of traditional leadership beliefs, which associate men with leadership. Eagly and Carli (2007) also asserted that women suffer considerably more than men when becoming leaders due to the perceptions of leadership that support masculine characteristics.

However, Islam and Nasira (2016, p. 137) established that "acceptability as [a] leader mostly is determined by the qualification, not gender". Their study suggested that a positive attitude towards female leaders is correlated with the education and experience of female leaders. The participants in this study were highly qualified and had been working in universities over the long term; however, they still confirmed that they had encountered criticism when they were assigned to leadership roles. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, it is argued that the acceptability of leaders is not based on their qualifications but rather on their gender in Nepalese higher education.

#### 6.3.2.4 Gender discrimination in the workplace

This issue is interrelated with the previous section, as role congruity between gender and leadership role gives rise to masculine culture and negative attitudes towards female leadership resulting in gender discrimination at work, which often proves challenging for women's selection, promotion and success. The findings of this study demonstrated that Nepalese women are facing gender-based discrimination in higher education institutions. Although some participants claimed that they had not personally experienced this issue, they still claimed that gender discrimination is prevalent in the Nepalese higher education sector. The participants discussed various scenarios that revealed the existence of gender discrimination such as favoured appointments based on gender, boys' clubs resulting in homo-sociability and gender-based challenges, which was ultimately reflected in the ratio of women to men in senior positions. Participant F detailed that the leadership concept in Nepalese higher education favours men as a result of the mindset that "[the] male knows everything, male[s] are powerful, they can handle the things – administrative and academic". This reveals that leadership is still compared to the traditional concept of leadership that

considers men to be supreme and to know everything. This attitude results in women's capabilities being underestimated, which results in a negative attitude towards women that contributes to gender discrimination. These findings match those observed by Burton and Weiner (2016), Yousaf and Schmiede (2017) and Zhao and Jones (2017) gender stereotypes appear to be the other key reason for the lack of female leaders, and they have been studied as a barrier to women's development. Burton and Weiner (2016) claimed that organisations in which leadership ability is compared to traditional leadership traits still have quite rigid gender stereotypes that are difficult to overcome.

Moreover, the findings of this study also suggest that homo-sociability is the other factor causing gender discrimination. Nepalese universities are influenced by the masculine culture, and the existence of a boys' club supporting homosocial networking seems to be discriminatory to women in the Nepalese higher education sector resulting in an unfair selection and promotion process. These findings are in line with Shepherd's (2017) discovery that the low representation of female leaders in higher education was the result of men being seen as the safer and more experienced option, despite external competition and the pool of potential candidates. The outcome of her analysis indicated that the existence of homo-sociability in the selection process results in people similar to those already in the organisation being picked. Similarly, Alsubaie and Jones (2017) also discussed the homo-sociability aspect and the fact that it restricts women from social and professional networking. Morley (2014) also criticised the masculine culture for normalising masculine qualities as being essential in the recruitment and selection process, which creates difficulties for women. Overall, this study confirms that homo-sociability promotes men into higher positions while discriminating against women.

In addition, the primary literature also reported that women are being discriminated against on the basis of pay. Wirth (2009) and Cheston and Kuhn (2002) identified that wage inequalities are the result of professional discrimination. Although gender discrimination exists, the participants did not claim that there was a difference in the wages of men and women; they expressed their satisfaction that in Nepalese higher education, men and women are treated equally from the wages and pay point of view. Therefore, this study does not correspond with studies that connect gender discrimination and unequal pay.

#### 6.3.2.5 Lack of support for women's growth and development

The current study found that women in the Nepalese higher education sector are not offered appropriate support and encouragement from institutions for their career development. This is something that the participants considered as one of the barriers to them making progress. University support is important for women's progression, and especially in environments where men occupy the majority of the higher positions. Support could take any form; for example, introducing fair and equal gender representation, leadership training and a support programme for gaining experience (Warnick et al., 2014). However, the participants confirmed that they have not received any kind of support. It seems possible that the reason for this is that masculinity-favouring homo-sociability is affecting gender representation. These findings are consistent with Ga Choi's (2006) and Lyness and Thompson's (2000) observation that gender issues are problematic in relation to accessing opportunities that help women to grow.

While almost all the participants highlighted the importance of leadership training programmes for women in ensuring their success, unfortunately, it was claimed that women are not given any form of training. Furthermore, some participants also revealed that women are excluded from training and programmes, as men do not want women to succeed. Mbepera (2015) asserted that the lack of support has a close relationship with formal and informal networking. However, Schwanke (2013) explained that women struggle to be part of good networks due to the existence of a boys' club within organisations. Therefore, it can be argued that the existence of a boys' club in universities favours men when it comes to climbing the leadership ladder, with support from training and programmes, whereas women are often ignored. Ga Choi (2006) cited that power, politics and networks are essential factors for climbing the organisational ladder, especially in South Asian countries. However, the patriarchal society and masculine culture in universities instinctively favour men when it comes to power relationships and networking; therefore, it can be argued that women struggle to build networks within such a culture. Lyness and Thompson's (2000) and Huang and Aaltio's (2014) findings also claimed similar results, asserting that men have an advantage over women as the social and cultural aspects favour men when it comes to social networking and power relationships, whereas women are hindered in their attempts to get involved in networking as a result of cultural and societal barriers.

The findings also suggested that gender diversity is not promoted by universities in Nepal, although there are several departments in which women could be an ideal fit. Given that the government is also hugely influenced by male dominance, it can be claimed that Nepalese women in higher education are not supported as a means of encouraging diversity. These findings are consistent with Longman (2018) declaration that the lack of supportive work policies, programmes and reward arrangements is a bias embedded in stereotypes and structural practices. One would anticipate universities to support and encourage women wishing to enter into leadership; however, with the lack of such support and inspiration, women continue to be under-represented in higher education.

### 6.3.3 Individual barriers

Along with social and organisational factors, there are some individual factors that emerge as barriers to female leadership. The findings suggest the existence of various individual barriers such as they struggle to balance work and family life in a patriarchal society, the lack of support from family, women's lack of confidence in themselves and the lack of role models. These equate with the various arguments made in the literature. The social role theory and feminist theory guided the outcome of the findings.

#### 6.3.3.1 Balancing work and responsibilities at home

The current study found that balancing work and family life is one of the major factors that participants consider is affecting the development of female leadership in Nepal. This finding is in agreement with those of Hoobler et al. (2011), Mazerolle and Goodman (2013), Wosnitza et al. (2018) and Toffoletti and Starr (2016). The patriarchal culture in Nepal expects a woman to complete her household chores despite working full time, and there is the expectation that she will look after the children and spend time with the rest of the family. These results are consistent with Zhao and Jones (2017), Toffoletti and Starr's (2016) and Ga Choi's (2006) findings that women's multiple responsibilities increase the burden on working-class professional women when it comes to meeting their obligations in professional and personal life.

In addition, Nepalese families live as a joint family, which results in more duties for a woman, as she needs to look after her in-laws along with her children and husband. Therefore, additional responsibilities mean additional difficulties when it comes to balancing work and family life. This was also indicated in Hoobler et al.'s (2011) study, which revealed

that the main reason for women's lower representation in senior roles was the conflict between work and family life mainly seen in female employees, who were also criticised for this conflict as a result of social role expectations.

The findings revealed that commuting to work and the working patterns in universities also generate further difficulties for Nepalese women. Women are expected to be home on time to prepare dinner and look after the children. Therefore, long hours spent commuting and extended hours at university are not approved by their families, making it problematic for women to work full time. Therefore, Nepalese women are not as flexible with their working hours as men, which means they will potentially lose out on opportunities to be promoted (Risse, 2018; Wilton & Ross, 2017; Bentley & Kyvik, 2013). Piterman (2008) also claimed that women with flexible full-time work are more likely to secure jobs, while retaining flexibility provides them with an opportunity to move into senior positions within the organisation.

The findings of this study also indicated that women are disregarding academic roles due to their responsibilities at home. This was also found by Perna (2005), who reasoned that women purposely pursue a career that is less demanding so that they can find a balance between work and being a mother. Bentley and Kyvik (2013) also claimed that universities' long hours and extreme workload have been challenging for female leaders. Similarly, Wilton and Ross (2017), Hakim (2006) and Langford (2010) are finding that women academic leaders are accepting reduced work hours and sacrificing their work success in order to fulfil their household duties. Therefore, it can be concluded that balancing work and family life has proven to be a barrier for Nepalese women academic leaders. This is in line with the other findings from around the globe.

#### 6.3.3.2 Lack of support from one's family

The findings indicated that the lack of family support is another vital barrier for Nepalese women in their career progression. The culture in Nepal – which favours sons over daughters, and its attendant gender role expectations – has impacted attitudes towards women, resulting in a lack of support for women's education and career development. Women are obliged to complete household chores and to look after children as a part of their responsibilities, and the participants revealed that the situation gets tougher for women after they get married, as

there is an added responsibility of living with their in-laws and the restrictions women have to face as a daughter-in-law.

Moreover, the participants also discussed the lack of division of labour in the home: women are expected to do everything on their own. The culture of a man being considered the head of the family and not being expected to help women with household chores is making matters difficult for women. The social norms and role expectations in Nepal have been proven to be unsupportive for women. This situation does not change even when a woman is working as much as a man. This kind of culture has resulted in a lack of support for women when it comes to them taking on higher roles and responsibilities. These findings are consistent with Oguntoyinbo's (2014) and Kalaitzi et al.'s (2017) studies, which also concluded that a lack of family support is a key barrier that accounts for women's under-representation in leadership roles.

Family support has been discussed as being one of the important elements for women's education and career development (Morley & Crossouard, 2015), especially in Asian countries where the culture with regard to educating girls is still reserved. It is not possible for a woman to continue with a higher level of study and ignore the culture of early marriage without the support of her family. However, the participants in this study disclosed that young women are still facing the pressure of marriage from family and society. This was also verified through the data (see Table 12): female enrolment in education decreases significantly with an increase in the level of education.

In addition, as the hours worked in universities can often be long, women need approval from their families to commit to working these hours. Moreover, family support also helps women to go out and work. However, most of the women do not receive that kind of support from their families due to cultural beliefs and role expectations, which result in women taking on more domestic responsibilities. This is similar to Reitman and Schneer's (2008) study, which mentioned that women are engaged in unpaid household work more than men and added that the nonlinear pattern between work and family life disturbs women's careers. Probert (2005) also testified that the balance in home responsibilities along with work is crucial for women's careers, as they create time and opportunity for women's career success.

This study confirms that a lack of family support is a key barrier that Nepalese women are experiencing; however, this barrier has not been discussed by many studies. Therefore, the findings of this study contribute new knowledge to the literature.

#### 6.3.3.3 Lack of confidence

The findings of this study indicated various standpoints with regard to Nepalese women's confidence. Some of the participants in the study claimed that Nepalese women are not confident enough in their own decisions, as they feel hesitant due to the fear of success distress. It was found that women rely on men for decision-making and agree to anything that men decide, thus suggesting that women worry about raising their voices. These findings are in agreement with those of Burkinshaw (2015), Alsubaie and Jones (2017)and Johns (2013), who found that a lack of self-confidence is creating a personal barrier for women that prevents them from moving into senior positions. Likewise, Chesterman et al.'s (2005) study also established that women are cautious in applying for senior positions if they do not have encouragement and support from others; this wariness, along with a lack of confidence, determination and risk-taking attitude, is the main factor driving women's avoidance of leadership roles.

Similarly, this study also discovered that Nepalese women do not like to put themselves forward for roles and are wary of progressing in their careers. This is similar to the report by Johns (2013), who found that the lower ambitions and career expectations of women have hampered their success as leaders: women often lack confidence and belief in themselves, resulting in them being less risk-taking with regard to their career choices. Similarly, a few other studies, such as, Chesterman et al. (2005) and Johns (2013) have also reported that women are reluctant to apply for senior positions, which has been linked to a lack of confidence and determination.

A few of the participants stated that Nepalese women avoid any kind of disagreement due to the fear of criticism. Nepalese women prefer to work in a stable environment and to avoid distress; therefore, women agree with others instead of raising their voices. This is in line with Lindeman et al.'s (2018) study, which found that women do not lack confidence; rather, it is often a fear of criticism that stops them from self-promoting. Similarly, Guillen et al. (2015) and Thomson (2018) also argued that women do feel confident in their leadership abilities; hence, the confidence gap is just women's inability to promote themselves. In

addition, one of the participants argued that women are confident, but their decisions need approval from higher up. She claimed that most of the positions at a higher level are occupied by men who may not be willing to take a risk. Therefore, she declared that it is not always the women; it can be the case that men being unwilling to take a risk can be reflected in women not being viewed as risk-takers. This finding further agrees with O'Neil and Hopkins (2015) argument that lack of confidence can be seen in men too and therefore "painting all women with [the] broad brush of lacking confidence" ignores other factors, such as those that consider men as natural leaders.

The findings of this study align with the literature with regard to the fact that a lack of confidence and ambition are personal barriers that prevent Nepalese women from progressing towards leadership positions in higher education institutions. However, there were disagreements, which suggested that it is not women that lack confidence; rather, it is the system that makes it difficult for women.

#### 6.3.3.4 Lack of role models makes it difficult to reflect on what is possible

As AlWahaibi's (2017), Alsubaie and Jones's (2017) and Carnes et al.'s (2008) study on female leadership have highlighted, the scarcity of role models is the other problem for women's success. The sense of what is possible is guided by drawing inspiration from others and learning and developing from leaders of the past and present, and this is part of our identity development (Sealy & Singh, 2008). Therefore, female leaders in higher positions act as role models for other women, whom to draw inspiration from them and recognise what is possible. These role models can influence women's perceptions of certain careers by boosting their confidence and inspiring them to become a leader.

However, the findings of this study indicate that the low numbers of Nepalese women in leadership positions in higher education prove that there is a scarcity of role models in higher positions for other women to look up to. This fact was also confirmed by the participants, who discussed the difficulty of connecting to someone due to the lack of women in higher positions. This was also echoed by Airini et al. (2011), who asserted that if women are not present in senior positions in institutions, it becomes tough for other ambitious women to see themselves as being capable of taking on such a position or role.

The participants also discussed the fact that having a role model has a positive impact on future generations. On seeing women in leadership positions in higher education institutions,

aspiring women can relate to them, which contributes to boosting their confidence. However, having more men than women in senior positions in the academic sector can be demotivating for women when they think about their potential future in the Nepalese academic sector. This was also reasoned by Plas and Woodman (2014), who explained that as more men occupy senior roles in the majority of sectors, the ratio of women has always been low, resulting in a lack of motivation for women to grow as a result of reflecting on role models. Alsubaie and Jones (2017) also stated that women need more role models in comparison to men: as men are the majority in workplaces, women – and especially minority women – must have a role model or a group of a similar kind to make them believe that success is possible.

However, the participants in this study stated that having a role model does not necessarily mean just having many Nepalese women in higher education leadership positions; rather, they stressed the importance of having capable women in higher positions who can exhibit true leadership qualities to others, which will help them to get motivated and work towards attaining such a role. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that role models should be capable and not just great in number. These findings are in agreement with Morley and Crossouard's (2015) observation that if women believe that they are facing gender-based barriers to their success, then women with a successful career can inspire them through their stories of attaining success despite these barriers Therefore, these findings add further to the existing literature by suggesting that it is important to have capable women in higher positions as role models, instead of just many women.

## 6.4 Strategies Adopted by Nepalese Women to Overcome Leadership Barriers

To attain higher positions, Nepalese women academic leaders have fought their own battles using various strategies. It is important to recognise their approaches to overcoming leadership barriers in the Nepalese higher education setting so that these can benefit future female leaders. The current study discovered various vital approaches that supported Nepalese female leaders in succeeding in higher education leadership roles. Factors such as determination, dedication to their work, positive contributions to the institution and quality work helped women to succeed in their roles. Aside from personal dynamics, other factors such as networking, support from colleagues and education and knowledge helped them to get into leadership positions.

The findings of this study suggested that determination to thrive enabled the participants to lead proficiently. Some of the participants shared their stories of failure and how failure made them determined to keep trying and to be successful. As there are several barriers preventing Nepalese women from getting into leadership positions, such as balancing work and family life, convincing their family to allow them to work outside the home and organisation-related challenges, the participants were of the view that staying determined is important for overcoming these challenges. This is consistent with Shahtalebia et al.'s (2011) and Redmond et al.'s (2017) discovery that determination, faithfulness and the sensitivity of women to their jobs are major success factors.

However, negative comments from society, family and colleagues could harm women's self-confidence; therefore, some of the participants urged women to be prepared for negative scenarios and to be determined to prove their worth. These findings are in agreement with Redmond et al.'s (2017) observation, which also suggested that women should adopt a positive spirit, in terms of never giving up, while embracing opportunities and risking failure in the process of seeking leadership roles. Likewise, Pheko (2014) also recommended that women should be ambitious and work hard to meet their goals. In addition, it was claimed that women give up easily when they get to a certain level in their careers because of family pressures or a lack of women's enthusiasm. Therefore, the participants urged women not to give up and stay strong. This was also echoed in Redmond et al.'s (2017) study, which urged women to adopt a "never give up" spirit while embracing opportunities and taking risks in the process of seeking leadership. It is important for women to stay focused, work hard towards their goals and embrace uncertainties to achieve their goals as participants described the attitude of never giving up helped them reach their positions despite the hurdles.

The participants stated that they are dedicated to working hard and doing quality work. It was by doing so that the participants vowed that they had managed to achieve the position that they were in at the time of taking part in the interviews. Most of the participants shared this strategy; namely, that working hard with dedication makes the process worthwhile. The participants used other terms such as "sincerity", "time management" and "constant commitment" to define their dedication to their work.

In the same vein, dedication to completing quality work is the other instrumental factor that participants considered was helpful. Despite the unfair appointment and selection process, the findings suggested that quality work was a useful factor, as it enabled women to prove

themselves and get into higher positions. During the interviews, it was further clarified that quality work should be accomplished with professionalism while making fair decisions, avoiding any kind of bias and maintaining enthusiasm. These are equivalent to the leadership competencies identified by Silong et al. (2008), who stated that professionalism is one of the key qualities that a leader should have. In addition to this, the participants also stated that making a positive contribution to the institution can play an effective part in achieving success. This matches Scott's (2018) discovery that devoting passion and energy to bringing about positive changes in an organisation is a strategy that leads to leadership success.

The findings also suggested that confidence is one of the key factors that women should possess in order to move into leadership roles and stay in such positions. The participants in this study felt that confidence had helped them to prove themselves, make strong decisions and find their way within male-dominated settings. During the interviews, it was revealed that women who are not confident would easily agree to what men wanted, and therefore their voices were never heard. The participants who presented themselves as being confident and bold found that they were perceived as being leaders by male colleagues, and they revealed that they were never looked down on and viewed as lacking in confidence. In an environment where the pressure on decision-making can be extreme, a lack of confidence could easily sway decisions and prove women as being weak. Thus, self-confidence helps women to present themselves as being resilient, make decisions without hesitation and raise their voices. These findings are consistent with Bass and Riggio's (2006), Coleman's (2009) and Hannum et al.'s (2015) discovery that self-confidence is an important factor, as women in senior positions exhibit characteristics such as self-confidence, emotional intelligence and charisma to maximise their influence. Similarly, Cubillo and Brown's (2003) study of successful women education leaders around the world found that women who displayed independent, self-confident and self-reliant qualities despite a male-dominated culture were able to break through obstacles. This finding also supported Eagly and Sczesny's (2009) view that female leaders must fight to develop leadership styles that match the qualities people wish for in women with the qualities that people feel leaders should have in order to be successful.

During the interviews, the participants agreed that networking is essential for success, with some of them claiming that they benefit from being part of good networks. Participant B mentioned that "if you're short of connection[s] it becomes a tough time to get a job"; thus, it

seems to be a pattern in the Nepalese context that power and networking play a great part in securing certain roles. These findings are in agreement with the existing literature, which emphasises the importance of networking for women's career development.

The findings also revealed that being part of active networks has helped the participants to coordinate with each other, ask for favours, help each other and make progress in their careers. These findings match those observed in earlier studies by Obers (2014) and Pheko (2014), who found that networking was considered a key part of leadership success by female leaders. Obers (2014) observed that networking provides understanding from the mutual group, assists in problem-solving and promotes the sharing of support and guidance. The findings of this study emphasised the importance of mixed networking to sustain women in male-dominated sectors given that women have very low representation in higher roles, female leaders are small in quantity and the majority of senior positions are occupied by men. The findings further support the notion of Day (2000); that women should establish network with men and not just with women. Elias (2018) also advised women to be active in in-person networking that encompasses both genders and to devote time to nurturing these relationships.

The findings of this study also indicated the importance of networking with like-minded people in a professional setting with regard to the fact that it can offer a lot of benefits. This result further supports the findings of Harris et al. (2013), who emphasised that networking within institutions is important for research relationships, information sharing and learning purposes. Moreover, McNaea and Valib (2015) found that more women were engaged in informal networking outside universities than formal networking and that while informal networking helped them to understand more about leadership, it was difficult to transfer what they had learned into university settings. Hence, McNaea and Valib's (2015) findings, which were also supported by Wipp (2018), claimed that the lack of proper networking within the professional environment creates academic isolation for women who are looking to succeed.

The current study also found that gaining qualifications to the standard level is one of the strategies that women can employ to present themselves as potential leadership candidates. The minimum qualification required to get into senior academic positions is a Ph.D. The majority of the participants, 11 out of 12, were highly educated, with a Ph.D. qualification and years of experience. One of the major criteria mentioned with regard to the selection and promotion process was education and experience, as per the participants' comments. This

was also echoed by Hopkins et al. (2008), who stated that education helps in raising the bar and creating opportunities for progressing towards senior positions. The participants considered education as being the key to success. Some of the participants also asserted that education had helped them to be confident and develop more. This is equivalent to Sheikh and Loney's (2018) study, which found that education enhances knowledge and information, and also helps in relation to critical thinking and proving oneself as a potential candidate; hence, women need to be educated to a standard level to compete for leadership roles alongside men. The participants also discussed the fact that experience increases their chance of being promoted. Therefore, education, along with experience, is instrumental to women's success in academia in Nepal.

Moreover, the findings of this study also discovered that an aptitude for persuading people, a positive attitude and maintaining good relationships with colleagues was constantly mentioned by the participants with regard to their success. For Nepalese women to survive in a male-dominated sector (i.e., higher education), it is essential for them to maintain a good relationship with male colleagues along with female colleagues. This is consistent with Onubogu's (2007) discovery that working alongside men helps women in securing the necessary attitudes and changes in mindset that lead to personal development, which was also evident in the later study by Cowper-Smith et al. (2017). The outcome of employing such a strategy was discussed by a few participants, who said that they received positive responses from male colleagues. One of the participants also said that she was put forward for promotion by her male colleagues. Therefore, creating a positive impression eventually aids women in overcoming challenges. Another participant also stated that she had more colleagues supporting and cooperating with her, which outnumbered the rebels. Therefore, coordination with co-workers has been proved to be favourable for the participants in overcoming challenges and sustaining women in their positions. These findings are consistent with those obtained by AlWahaibi (2017), Onubogu (2007) and Cowper-Smith et al. (2017). Collaboration and motivation are not the only important leadership qualities, however. Alwahaibi (2017) discovered that social and professional relationships appeared to be very helpful with regard to helping the participants in her study to achieve success in male-dominated institutions. Many of her participants emphasised that healthy relationships helped them to obtain and maintain a senior leadership position.

This study has previously discussed the importance of family support in relation to helping women to cope with work-life balance issues, social role expectations, early marriage and childbearing, and gender-stereotyped societal perspectives. Some of the participants felt that having supportive in-laws helped them to continue with their careers, while some others acknowledged that having a supportive husband had helped them to work freely. Moreover, the participants also highlighted the fact that having an educated family made a difference in terms of support. Therefore, it was noted that support from one's family in any form is essential for Nepalese women: the participants suggested that women should find a way to work around balancing work and family life in order to be successful. One of the participants suggested that she would keep her family as her priority and complete all her household chores before going to work. Similarly, another participant said that she had taught her husband how to support her with household chores. Meanwhile, some others were of the view that women should be determined about pursuing their careers and convincing their families to support them. Although these strategies are different depending on each individual, they can be hugely beneficial. As early marriage has been revealed to be a barrier to women's progression, it was suggested that women should prioritise their careers and avoid early marriage. This will reduce the problem of women having additional responsibilities towards their families. This is consistent with Shahtalebi et al.'s (2011) findings that female leaders were able to balance work and family life as a result of having a supportive family and supportive husband. In a different vein, Yousaf and Schmiede (2017) and McNaea and Vali (2015) discovered that women with inadequate support from their families faced barriers to their progression.

Negative attitudes about female leaders have made it harder for female leaders to fight their way up the career ladder in organisations with a masculine culture (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009; Warnick et al., 2014). Thus, women are advised to raise their voices and fight for their right to survive in that environment. Due to the fact that determination to achieve personal and professional growth, work ethics and education are suggested as ways of moving into higher positions, women are advised to develop these areas in order to achieve success. Similar advice was also given by participants in Redmond et al.'s (2017) study: they asserted that aspiring women should be proactive, committed to self-development and aim for higher positions.

In the same vein, the participants in this study highlighted their willingness to support their staff, uphold good relationships and encourage their colleagues, rather than satisfying an egotistical need for recognition. These findings confirm the discoveries in the literature regarding the importance of interpersonal skills for leaders (Day, 2000; Silong et al., 2008; Mohamad, 2012) when it comes to promoting positive, friendly and effective relationships with colleagues. The participants also confirmed that having a positive relationship with colleagues helped them to get promoted.

Overall, these findings on the strategies used by female leaders in higher education, which are based on their own experiences, could provide guidance for aspiring women as they work their way into leadership positions. The following section will discuss the results with regard to the final research question by outlining the ways of increasing the number of female leaders in the higher education sector in Nepal.

## 6.5 Ways to Inspire More Women into Leadership Roles in Higher Education

During the interviews, the participants highlighted a few aspects that required alteration in terms of the governmental and organisational support needed to increase women's representation in leadership roles in the higher education sector. Along with that, the participants also shared their stories in the hope of inspiring other women to pursue higher positions.

The participants in this study mentioned that a supportive environment was necessary for women's progression. The participants urged universities to implement a fair selection and promotion process, and to put in place plans to encourage women to pursue higher positions. The importance of the quota system was also stressed; the participants highlighted its importance with regard to increasing women's representation in higher education. This is consistent with Parker et al.'s (2018) observation that transitioning from being a leading academic into an academic leader is difficult for women, therefore women should be supported with no discrimination. Therefore, women should be provided with a supportive setting that encourages their growth.

The participants also discussed the necessity for the government to support women's representation in higher education. Although the government has been speaking about the equal representation of women in higher education, the participants found that the equal representation rule has not been implemented properly. Consequently, women are still under-

represented in senior roles in higher education. Even though some women have been represented through the seats allocated for women, the participants claimed that those seats were only filled to make up the numbers. If women who are not suited to, or are incapable of, working in certain roles are put into certain positions, there is the risk that women generally could be viewed as being incapable. Therefore, the participants stated that the seats allocated for women should be used when required and that women who are confident in their abilities should not use them to get into higher positions. Therefore, an argument still exists as to whether the quota system is the right approach for increasing women's representation or whether it makes women less confident.

A significant barrier faced by women was balancing work and family life. Long university hours, family responsibilities and societal obligations have made it difficult for women to find a balance between work and family life. Some of the participants revealed that women are turning down opportunities or considering low responsibility jobs in order to find a balance between two roles; therefore, it is important for universities to promote programmes and policies to help women find that balance. Some of the participants compared their lives to the Western way of living and working and suggested that introducing similar support in Nepal, such as nurseries for children and flexibility in working hours, etc., could help to reduce the pressure that women encounter. This is also consistent with Alwahaibi's (2017) recommendation that higher education institutions should provide childcare facilities, such as nurseries, and offer less demanding and more flexible working hours.

Drawing on the participants' experiences, it is possible to determine that there are no clear policies and plans in place that could help women to access leadership positions in the Nepalese higher education sector. During the interviews, the participants stated that they are not supported with any leadership training, coaching or mentoring, which are considered effective programmes to encourage female leadership development. The absence of such development programmes and plans will impact the course of women's career development. Alwahaibi et al. (2017, p. 218) concluded that the "absence of leadership development directly correlates to the disproportionate representation of women in higher education leadership positions", and this is seen in Nepalese higher education as well. Leadership training and development programmes can help women to gain confidence and construct professional networks (Debebe et al., 2016); hence, it is important to offer women appropriate leadership programmes. This further agrees with Cañas et al. (2019, p. 11)

conclusion that “programs directed toward developing leadership skills in women are essential because they provide a shared space to talk about the experiences women face as potential academic professionals”;  participants in their study stated that such programmes helped them to develop their “identities as professionals and normalize concerns about the workforce”. Therefore, this study proposes developing strategies to implement required training and programmes that will ensure more women are represented in higher education institutions.

As education is a key factor for securing academic work in Asia, and as women are still facing inequality in education when compared to men, which results in women being eliminated as potential candidates (Morley & Crossouard, 2015) the participants in this study stressed that universities should allocate part of their budgets to supporting women’s education by providing them with a bursary. As girls are still discriminated against within the education system, it was suggested that this should start in the early education system: if more access to education was provided for girls, universities could follow the same pattern and support women’s education by providing scholarships. This is in line with Alsubaie and Jones’s (2017) potential strategies, such as equal education, leadership development training for women, organisational support, etc., which can be used in order to overcome the barriers to women’s education.

Although the participants believed that women are slowly stepping up, the majority advised women to go out and work by pushing their boundaries. It was found that some women stay at home and rely on their husbands for everything; therefore, the participants advised women to find opportunities for themselves and become independent.

## 6.6 Contributions to Theory and Practice

This research is the first study to explore the barriers faced by Nepalese women leaders in higher education and the strategies used to overcome them. It has offered rich information, with regard to women leaders’ stories, that adds great value to the limited information available in relation to this area of the higher education sector, which has not been investigated previously. Upon conducting a primary literature review, it was found that there is limited research centred on Nepalese female leaders. The majority of the existing literature is mainly focused on politics and business, and there is significantly little written about the challenges faced by women in leadership roles in higher education. Of what has been

published in the field of study, the majority of the existing studies have been focused on mid to junior-level women employees, and almost all of them are only focused on understanding barriers. This research bridges that gap in the academic literature by making a substantial and original contribution to the knowledge of female leadership in higher education. By investigating both the challenges and potential solutions, this study identifies various practical steps that can be taken to overcome these barriers.

This study also provides insights into the Nepalese higher education sector in the hope of creating a positive leadership environment that will attract, inspire and develop future women leaders so that they can succeed. There are several differences in the cultural, social and organisational aspects of Asian societies, when compared to Western societies, that have not been explored fully previously; thus, this research adds to the literature by exploring these issues in the Nepalese context. The overall findings of this study contribute to the theoretical debate about female leadership by exploring women's experiences from various perspectives and their access to leadership roles in higher education. Although several studies have been carried out around the globe to understand women's under-representation in higher education, these are mainly based on the Western perspective. Given that the social and cultural aspects of Nepal are different, the researcher argues that the problems Nepalese women leaders are facing cannot be generalised based on the outcomes of the studies conducted in the Western context. The issues discussed in the literature were focused on gender role expectations and role incongruity between gender roles and female leaders' roles; however, in the context of Nepal, the outcome of the findings adds different dimensions to the existing theory and literature.

The outcomes of the study show that traditional social and cultural aspects are deeply engrained in Nepalese society, making it difficult for women to go out and work freely. The findings of this study provide evidence of the fact that women are expected to complete household chores despite working equally as hard as men outside the home. This situation may still be prevalent in some parts of the Western world, but in Nepal, this situation is found in the majority of households. The reasoning for this is the social stigma attached to cultural norms. The preference for a son over a daughter, and the existence of a patriarchal culture, create discrimination against women in all phases of life starting from birth. The strong preference for a child of a particular gender, even before a baby is born, is not an issue in the Western context due to different social attitudes; however, it remains an issue in Nepal. More

to that, this study found that women face criticism from society for sharing their responsibilities since men are viewed as the most important member of society who should therefore not be managed by women. Therefore, the findings of this study go beyond confirming the existence of role expectations: women are not just expected to play their gender-based roles; they also face criticism for sharing their roles.

Similarly, in terms of organisational barriers, although there were some issues reported in Nepal that are reported in other parts of the world – such as workplace discrimination, negative attitudes towards women and women's leadership, and organisational politics – other issues were reported by the participants that were specific to the Nepalese context. The outcomes of the study showed that political intervention in Nepalese higher education has hugely impacted women's growth within Nepalese higher education. The key political positions are occupied by men, and since positions at (mainly governmental) universities are based on political appointments, women are hugely disadvantaged during selection and promotion. Similarly, gender discrimination towards women and negative attitudes towards women leaders are mainly derived from the social view whereby men are considered as supreme members of society, and society has a strong message for women that they should not lead the male member of the family. The outcomes of the study also suggest the existence of a taboo; namely, that men do not like to be led by women, while in terms of individual barriers, the findings of this study suggest that women are struggling to balance work and family life due to their dual responsibilities. The responsibility of looking after the in-laws is considered as women's priority before work; therefore, women are struggling to find a balance between their work and family life.

These outcomes prove that there are several other dimensions to the problems women are experiencing that are based on social and cultural aspects. These problems could have been missed had the problems in the Nepalese context been generalised from Western research. Therefore, this study argues that barriers to women's development should not be generalised from research conducted in different contexts; rather, research should focus on discovering reality based on the society in which the participants live and the culture they are part of. By exploring the diverse problems Nepalese women are experiencing when advancing into leadership positions with a sole focus on the Nepalese context, this study makes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

The findings of this study reveal that individual, organisational and societal barriers are interrelated with the culture and norms of society, while social role expectations and Nepal's patriarchal culture are found to form the main foundation for these barriers. The support of one's family and husband, as a contributing factor to women's progression, has been explored by researchers; however, there has been no consideration of the significance of the mother-in-law to women's progression. Therefore, this study contributes a new argument to the literature; namely, that the mother-in-law plays a substantial role in contributing to women's career progression. Thus, the support provided from one woman to another can perhaps change the whole situation. This also led to another interesting finding of this study that a woman who experiences discrimination is likely to behave the same way as her daughter-in-law. Therefore, having a working and educated mother-in-law was found to be a supportive factor for a woman's career, while those without a supportive mother-in-law had to compromise and fit in with the family. This finding suggests that women's employment status is directly proportional to the employment status of their partner's mother. These findings are in agreement with Arcarons's (2018) discovery of the positive link between women's employment status and the employment status of their partner's mother.

Despite societal and organisational barriers, some women have been able to manoeuvre their way into leadership positions. These successful female leaders portrayed the picture of boldness and assertiveness as well as collaborative and supportive aspects through their stories. Although these traits of leadership are similar to the literature discussed in the western context what makes Nepalese women's leadership different is their approach to manoeuvring their way into leadership roles and sustaining in the role. These female leaders are changing their way of leadership based on their survival needs. Therefore, it can be argued that Nepalese female leadership is different to what's available in the literature and propose to define the leadership theory with a new name "survival leadership".

The findings of this study also indicated that Nepalese higher education still favours masculinity by preferring men as leaders and perpetuating negative attitudes towards women; thus, women are still facing prejudices. This challenges existing studies (Cosimini, 2011; Koenig et al., 2011), which argue that the traditional paradigm of leadership is shifting from a preference for masculine qualities to a preference for feminine qualities and, as a consequence, state that women should experience reduced prejudice. While the majority of the existing studies have reported that women do not, in themselves, want to progress, the

findings of this study indicate that women are found to be less committed to their work due to role expectations at home, which cause them to disregard career opportunities. Therefore, it can be argued that external factors such as the societal culture, role expectations and social attitudes towards women hold women back more than the women themselves.

With respect to its methodological contribution, this study adopted a novel interpretivist, social constructivist and feminist approach to gain insights into Nepalese women leaders' experiences; no prior exploration has been conducted in this way. This study aimed to explore the barriers faced by Nepalese women leaders in higher education along with the strategies that help women leaders to overcome these barriers and adopting a constructivist approach combined with a feminist approach enabled the researcher to investigate this issue deeply by focusing on women and their problems. As the percentage of women in leadership positions is significantly low, conducting this research using the qualitative approach would have been inappropriate. Therefore, a qualitative research method was adopted in this study, which helped the researcher to gather in-depth information regarding women leaders' experiences, perspectives and strategies.

The use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool helped the researcher to paint a clear picture of women leaders' experiences in Nepalese higher education, and this method also provided women leaders with the opportunity to open up about the problems they have encountered and the strategies they have adopted in order to overcome these barriers. The female leaders described these experiences by sharing examples, incidents, facts and their personal feelings, all of which reflected their experiences as leaders. The barriers and strategies discussed by the participants provide ideas with regard to actions that could be helpful for policymakers and other women working at the same level to reflect on. Ultimately, this study makes a significant contribution to the study of female leadership in Nepal.

The secondary data collected in this research provides vital information about female leaders' experiences in the higher education sector, which adds more information to the existing body of literature and provides a wider overview of the situation within the higher education context in Nepal. Due to the lack of significant research and data on higher education, studies on this topic may have been unattractive and difficult for many researchers. Hence, this research can act as a baseline for future research and attract potential studies in this area. It is also anticipated that this research will be beneficial in relation to developing an appropriate

leadership platform to inspire future women higher education leaders in Nepal. In addition, this research might be of interest to female leaders in Nepal who are in leadership positions and facing similar barriers, and particularly to women in higher education who are looking to advance into leadership roles or who are in leadership positions already. Hence, this study will be helpful for other female leaders or aspiring female leaders, as it will enable them to reflect on and implement these strategies in order to overcome leadership challenges.

This study also asserts that the Government of Nepal should consider designing and implementing appropriate plans and policies to support women's progression into higher positions in higher education. Although a quota system has been introduced by the Government of Nepal to encourage more women into higher education positions, it was discovered that the implementation of the quota system has to be done in an appropriate manner to increase women's representation in key positions. Therefore, this research suggests that the quota system should be applied in a strategic manner by appointing appropriate and capable candidates to available positions, as appointing candidates just to fill the available positions will defeat the purpose of the quota system. As the failure of one woman in a key position has been seen to result in the loss of opportunities for other aspiring women leaders, therefore it is important to have qualified women in key positions.

Also, Government should introduce a quota system for key leadership positions rather than just starting positions. This study finds that this will help to attract and encourage capable women to apply for positions, which will ultimately increase women's representation in these positions. Similarly, given that the participants discussed the difficulty of balancing work and family life due to their dual commitments, this study proposes that universities should support women by offering childcare support as a benefits package for women. Also, given that education is considered the main factor for qualifying for leadership roles, this study recommends that universities should support women's higher education. Likewise, universities should also launch leadership development programs for women, provide mixed-gender networking platforms and emphasise the importance of gender equity.

This study can also be used by government bodies to analyse the problems in the higher education sector and create an appropriate plan that will empower women to enter into leadership roles. Finally, this study also provided a platform for female leaders to express their opinions and feelings by participating in this study. All the barriers and strategies have

been combined in order to propose recommendations for the development of female leadership; these will shed further light on this research area.

## 6.7 Implications for Policy and Practice

The outcomes of this study have important implications for potential research on female leadership development in higher education. It is believed that this study will be useful for policymakers, researchers and aspiring women leaders. The constructivist and feminist approach used in exploring the lived experiences of women leaders has revealed various barriers to women's progression and the strategies used by women leaders in overcoming these barriers. The information about these barriers can assist policymakers in redefining their policies to facilitate gender equality at the organisational level. Similarly, the stories about the successful strategies used by female leaders in overcoming leadership challenges can be helpful for others who are navigating the path towards leadership.

As indicated by the findings, the impact of social norms, role expectations and social attitudes is significant for women's development; therefore, this study suggests that policymakers should consider these factors closely when implementing programmes for women's development. In addition, the key barriers to Nepalese women's career development were found to be related to the organisational culture; higher education institutions were found to feature a masculine culture, negative attitudes towards female leadership, homo-sociability and favouritism. Therefore, higher education institutions should also attempt to investigate these barriers and formulate appropriate plans to encourage positive attitudes towards women, while minimising the barriers that women face. In addition, institutions should encourage gender equality and adopt policies that help women to cope with the pressures of balancing work and family life.

Despite the government's efforts to increase women's representation in senior positions – 33% of seats have been allocated to women – the implementation of this has not been seen to be effective, as women are still under-represented in senior positions in higher education. Therefore, the government should force the application of this quota system on a mandatory basis, but in an effective way. To do so, the quota system should be expanded to senior roles and the right candidate should be provided with opportunities. Also, there should be an appropriate policy in place ensuring the equal representation of both genders on universities' council boards so that the decisions made in universities represent both genders.

## 6.8 Recommendations for Future Research

The present study is based on female leaders at two universities in Nepal. It would be fascinating for a similar study to be conducted on a larger scale to include other universities in Nepal by broadening the participant base. It is anticipated that such a study based on various higher education institutions located in different regions, including both urban and rural areas, would generate more findings related to the under-representation of women in higher education leadership positions around the country. The comparison of female leaders' experiences in diverse social and traditional contexts could provide further insights and explanations, particularly for populations that were not focused on in this study. This could increase the professional prospects for women in those regions.

Some interesting findings in this study emphasise the need for a further study conducted from different perspectives. Hence, additional research may be required to fully comprehend the barriers faced by women; thus, understanding the perspectives of male leaders with regard to Nepalese women in higher education institutions may be useful. Therefore, another potential area of study could explore male leaders' perceptions of female leaders and ascertain whether male participants can identify any additional barriers to female leadership in higher education. Furthermore, it would be fascinating to conduct a comparative study that includes both genders working in higher education institutions in Nepal by reproducing the present study. This could include a large sample and seek to understand men's and women's perceptions of each other's involvement in the work setting. It would be interesting to establish how both genders view issues related to gender and to discover if they have similar or different perceptions. In addition, as this study is conducted based on the qualitative approach, another proposal for future research is to reproduce this study using the mixed-method approach. Providing participants with a way of answering the questionnaires first, and anonymously, and then conducting interviews to gain deeper insights into the problem would possibly lead to interesting discoveries.

This research provides rich data about and insights into women's lower representation in Nepalese higher education institutions and provides compelling findings based on female leaders' experiences. The problems explored here have not included all the problems experienced by Nepalese women in leadership positions in higher education; it is however

hoped that this study will open up possibilities for further research, whose findings will help Nepalese women to overcome the barriers that obstruct their professional growth.

## 6.9 Limitations of This Research

Like all other research studies, this research also has some limitations. Despite the fact that the aims of the research have been met, there were some issues that could not still be avoided; these can be considered as the limitations of this research. Firstly, subjectivity could not be avoided in this research. As pointed out by objectivists, the findings can be influenced by the researcher's perspective, which can create bias. However, during the data collection, all the researcher's knowledge and experiences were kept aside, and the participants' views were considered in a neutral manner by encouraging the participants to share their experiences in their own voices (Creswell, 2013).

Similarly, the qualitative method of data collection, using only interviews, is another limitation. The use of this method has been justified by providing a rationale for the selection of the particular methods and tools used. The findings of the data collection also support the argument for selecting a qualitative approach for the data collection. In addition, this research is based on female leaders in the higher education sector in Nepal and does not examine any other education sector. Only successful female leaders were selected for the interviews, which meant that this study could not determine the perceptions of other women in the same sector or male insights into leadership. Given that this research is mainly conducted to understand women's perspectives of leadership and explore their leadership journeys, this research did not observe any male leaders' perceptions of female leaders and their leadership. However, it is hoped that this research will stimulate further research in this area that offers an additional understanding of male leaders' perceptions of female leaders. In addition, the perceptions of women colleagues of female leaders were also not investigated in this research. As the main aim of the research was to focus on only female leaders, other female academic staff who are below the head of the faculty level were not included in the research. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this study will encourage further research that seeks to understand other women's views of female leaders.

The study was conducted with 12 female leaders based at two major universities in Nepal. A larger sample size could not be included in this research due to the lower ratio of women in leadership roles within the higher education sector. The situation is even worse in some

universities situated in remote geographical areas, which have barely any women in senior roles. Although this research identifies some of the barriers faced by women, it does not completely address the situation of women living in remote areas. In addition, the geographical location of the universities was another factor that made it difficult to conduct extensive research. As Nepal's cultural values differ depending on geographical location, this research may not include all the relevant cultural aspects.

## 6.10 Personal Reflection

### 6.10.1 The decision to undertake a Doctorate Programme

I was born in Nepal, grew up there and studied there until my A levels. During my school days, I saw that most of the senior positions were occupied by men and there were very few women in those positions. After completion of my A levels, I decided to pursue my higher education in the UK because of the noble education system and the modern culture of the country. I acquired Bachelor's and Master's degrees which helped me to get an opportunity to work as a manager for a beauty company. The experience I managed to gain through my work gave me a chance to understand leadership qualities and also sparked my interest in researching more about women's leadership. As I wanted to contribute to the Nepalese society and progress in my career, I started looking into doing a DBA, I had an urge to explore any research that had been done around women leaders' under-representation in Nepal but unfortunately, there was no research on the situation or about the barriers. This research was chosen to bridge the gap in the literature while answering my curiosity.

### 6.10.2 Shaping my ideas through various modules and webinars

Although I had some ideas about the research that I was doing, I must admit those ideas only got refined through the course modules that I was doing for the first one and half years. Each module contributed to defining my ideas and understanding what could be achieved.

#### 6.10.2.1 Literature review

I started studying widely the literature on women's leadership and the barriers women leaders have been facing. Exploring various literature and analysing different journals and articles, it helped to gain some understanding of the research context. Since there isn't enough research carried out in the context of Nepal, reviewing similar research that was conducted around the globe was beneficial. I found social role theory, role congruity theory and feminist theories

particularly instructive. Social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) provided me with an insight into the effect of social role expectations on women. As gender role is defined in Nepalese society since birth, it was interesting to find how social role impacts women's growth. Similarly, role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) provided a perspective on a negative attitude towards women leadership. As the study is aimed to understand the problems women are experiencing, feminist theory (Mendez, 2015; Eagly & Sczesny, 2009) helped to understand how objectives can be best achieved. Several barriers identified around the globe helped my understanding of the issues. Analysis of various scholars' views pushed me to be a critical thinker both personally and professionally.

#### 6.10.2.2 Selecting a Research Methodology

As I was looking into different research methodologies to achieve my research objectives, I discovered that the methodological positions being adopted are based mainly on two aspects i.e. philosophical assumptions around ontology and epistemology and the nature of research questions being studied (Collis & Hussey, 2014).

Being a researcher, it was important for me to identify where my research belonged and as there are many ways of observing the world, it was essential to figure out the best approach to my knowledge. Investigating the literature, interpretivism ideology was found best suited for the research topic. Whilst exploring the research technique, I was exposed to various research ideas. Understanding women leaders' problems require the understanding of the experiences of the participants and how they interpret the significant issues about their under-representation in leadership positions (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014).

I found that interpretivist ontology and constructivist epistemology provide the platform for understanding women's problems and the way they interpret the problem. As I discovered constructivism and feminist perspective are widely used in the feminist study (Wyer et al., 2013) and both incorporate well with interpretivist study Castro-Rea, 2016; Jung, 2019), constructivist and feminist epistemologies were selected for this research. I was glad that the methodological assignment helped me to explore the practicability of my research.

#### 6.10.2.3 Research tools

In this part of the module assignment, I was looking into the possible research tools and selecting the appropriate one for the research. I proposed to employ a semi-structured interview to encourage the participants to open up freely about the problem and share their

experiences (Adams, 2015). The data collected in the process are rich and specific. The format of the interview helped to conduct the interview in a semi-formal and unstructured fashion.

#### 6.10.2.4 Research Methods

This module made me reflect on the entire research journey and appreciate what had been achieved and look into achieving the remaining. The other main activity of the module session was about writing up the research aims and objectives. I ended up with multiple suggestions and ideas and each researcher's idea provided me with an insight into how the world is viewing my topic and the immense possibilities to be considered. Having done brainstorming and gathering such ideas, I started searching the literature on how those women leaders perceived leadership as and their strategies in dementing the barriers.

### 6.10.3 Role of Colloquium and webinars

During my research journey, I had a chance to attend various webinars in the UK and abroad. I had an opportunity to meet researchers from different backgrounds and had a chance to share my ideas. Presenting my paper at various webinars and conferences was very helpful in shaping my research. Discussion after each presentation provided me with a chance to understand how others were perceiving my work. It also provided me with an opportunity to ask questions to the audience and collect their views and feedback which guided me to progress further. I found myself more confident in mass speaking, and prompt thinking and I learned about engaging people through the presentations and webinars.

### 6.10.4 Supervisor session

On 17th March 2017, I received an email about my first supervisor Dr Sui Hong. After the first meeting session where we spent almost two hours discussing the topic, I was very happy to know about the interest of Dr Hong in my research. But at the same time, I realised that I needed to prepare more and come up with solid ideas on aims and objectives. I also had my second supervisor allocated after 6 months. Each supervisory session was productive. The discussions I had with my supervisors were constructive which helped me to improve the quality of my work subsequently and provided me with a chance to rethink my research from various aspects. Reflecting on my work after each supervisor session makes me realise the progress I have made and how far I have come. Working closely with my supervisors has helped me to grow both personally and professionally.

### 6.10.5 Researcher Then and Now (Conclusion)

To recall the start of my journey, I remember that I was looking for a bigger area of study. I must accept, looking back, that my ideas were random and scattered. I was not fully aware of what it would take to achieve such aims aside from personal experience and financial sustainability. Even though I had some knowledge of the subject area after the successful completion of the MBA program, I can now admit that my existing understanding was just a foundation. There was a lot more to comprehend regarding making sense of the subject area and creating my own study. The proposal I had was just a basic idea, and it was a piece of work that needed refinement and development. Overall, I was a beginner and looking for insight.

Now, I have grown into a person who is confident in analysing and solving problems without being worried. This year and a half-long journey have already brought about so much progress within me, both personally and professionally. Unlike before, I now do not let problems sway me and neither am I held captive by the problems that I face. I have now developed a positive attitude: I realised that every problem has a solution and can be solved with time and patience. This is probably one of the biggest lessons I have learnt from this experience. On a personal note, I have realised my strengths and weaknesses better through this research journey.

Whether connected to assessment or feedback, success or failure, I have learnt lessons that have added value to my life as a researcher. Each failure has been a lesson and has probably led me to future success. As a researcher, I now understand that the successful completion of the DBA journey involves setting a target, good time management, determination and a passion for exploration. A DBA is a self-owned piece of work; hence, I am a self-guided learner and explorer. Even though my supervisor has played an important role in guiding my path, they have not been the one to make decisions for me. It is on a researcher to have the freedom to explore things more and gain a deeper understanding. I feel that frequently asking myself "What are you seeking to achieve?", "How are you going to achieve it?", "What will it take to achieve it?", "How feasible is it?", "What are the risks involved?" and "What is the purpose of it?" has helped me direct myself and make wise decisions.

Time management is the other factor that I have learnt through my DBA experience. I have now committed to preparing a timeline for the completion of each task and updating it frequently. I must also say that I am more organised now than when I was a researcher. I have

also adopted what I have learnt about balancing my personal and professional life; I have allocated time for my studies and other parts of my life while focusing on what is a priority. Every assessment has helped me to develop a deeper understanding of all the phases of the research path, and I know myself a lot better. I have developed critical thinking abilities through completing the literature review. I was exposed to various scholars' views and being critical of those was a bit nerve-wracking. I found myself to be, as we say in Nepal, "a rat with several holes". I was unsure of what it took to be a critical thinker, but through assessment and feedback, I have learned to use my scholarly voice. I never had a deep knowledge of research paradigms until the assessment of methodological fundamentals. This helped me to decide on an appropriate philosophical position that would meet the aims of my research. I have also learned good qualitative research skills through the other assessments on research methods.

Overall, I have become a confident researcher with deeper knowledge about the whole research process and the different phases involved. I understand what it takes to complete a research project, the risks involved and how the research aims and objectives can be achieved systemically. Most importantly, I have learnt to believe in myself and to appreciate what I have achieved. However, there is still room for improvement – I will address this and improve over time!

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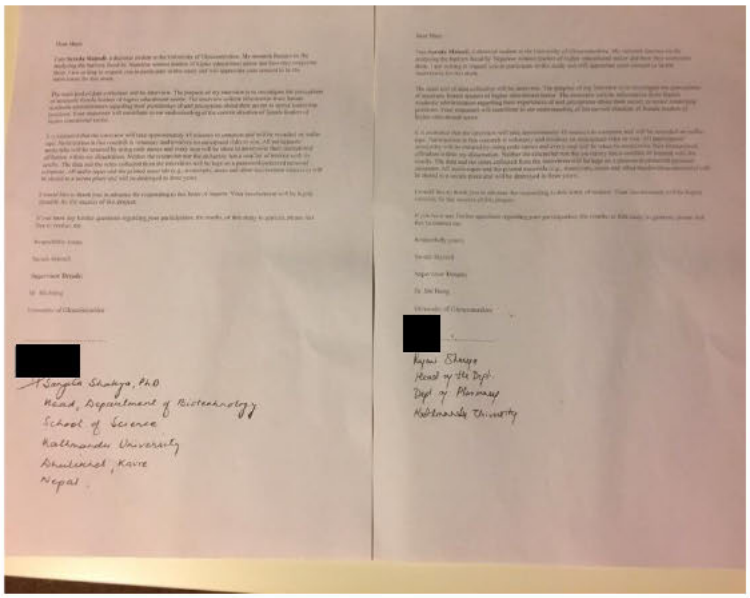
# Appendices:

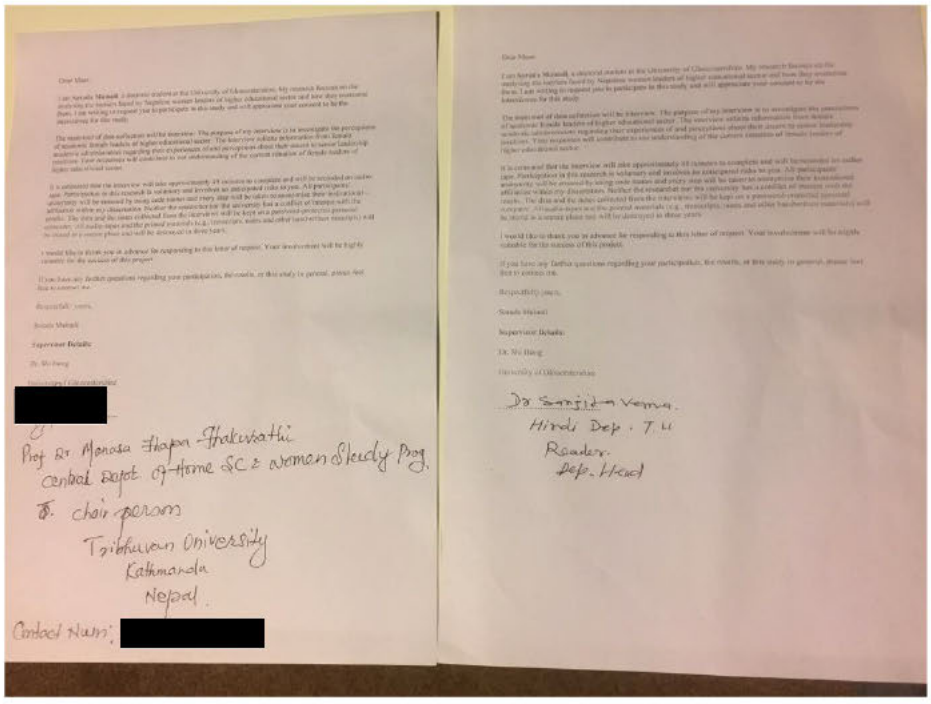
## Appendix: 1

Consent form signed by the participants



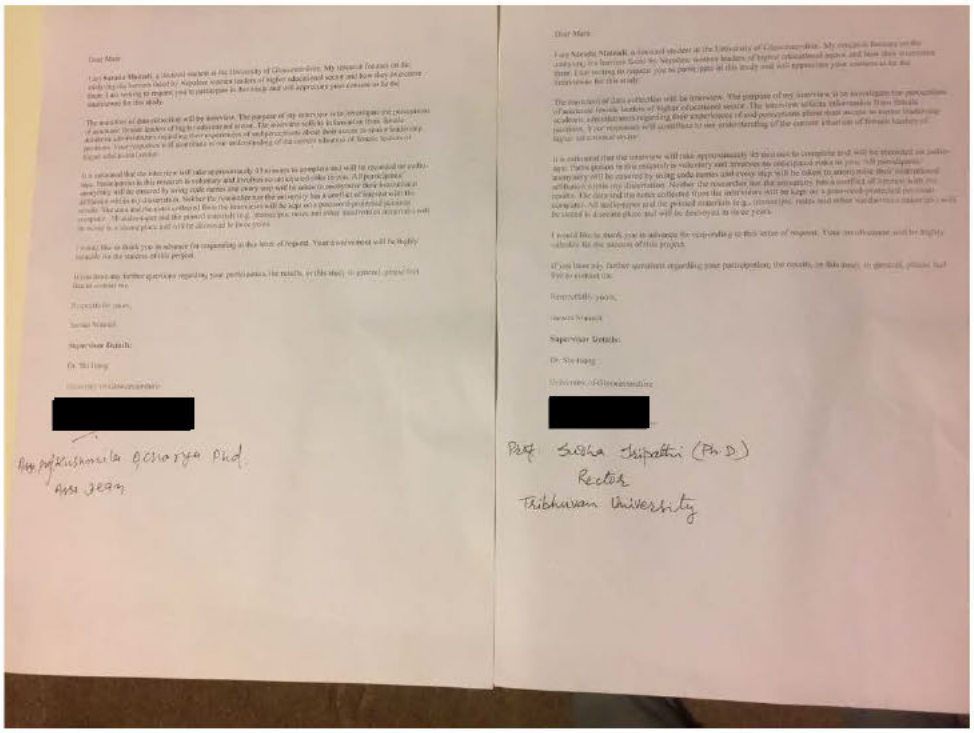
Dr Sangita Sakaya, PhD
Head, Department of Biotechnology
School of Science
Kathmandu University
Dhulikhel, Kavre
Nepal

Rajni Sharma
Head of the Dept.
Dept of Pharmacy
Kathmandu University



Prof Dr Manasa Thapa Thakuvatti
Central Dept of Home Sc & Women Study Prog.
& chairperson
Tribhuvan University
Kathmanda
Nepal
Contact Num:

Dr Sanjiv Verma
Hindi Dep. T.U
Reader
Dep. Head



Dear Mam

I am Sarada Mahtab, a doctoral student at the University of Gloucestershire. My research focuses on the leadership challenges faced by Nepalese women leaders of higher educational sector and how they overcome them. I am writing to request you to participate in this study and will appreciate your consent to be the interviewee for this study.

The main tool of data collection will be interview. The purpose of my interview is to investigate the perceptions of eminent female leaders of higher educational sector. The interview solicits information from female academic administrators regarding their experiences of and perceptions about their access to senior leadership positions. Your responses will contribute to our understanding of the current situation of female leaders of higher educational sector.

It is estimated that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete and will be recorded on audio tape. Participation in this research is voluntary and involves no anticipated risks to you. All participants' anonymity will be ensured by using code names and every step will be taken to ensure that their institutional affiliation is not identifiable in my dissertation. Neither the researcher nor the university has a conflict of interest with the results. The data and the notes collected from the interviewers will be kept on a password-protected personal computer. All audio-tapes and the printed materials (e.g., transcripts, notes and other handwritten materials) will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed in three years.

I would like to thank you in advance for responding to this letter of request. Your involvement will be highly valuable for the success of this project.

If you have any further questions regarding your participation, the results, or this study in general, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully yours,

Sarada Mahtab

Supervisor Details:

Dr. Yu Hang

University of Gloucestershire

[redacted]

Asst Dean

Dear Mam

I am Sarada Mahtab, a doctoral student at the University of Gloucestershire. My research focuses on the leadership challenges faced by Nepalese women leaders of higher educational sector and how they overcome them. I am writing to request you to participate in this study and will appreciate your consent to be the interviewee for this study.

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If you have any further questions regarding your participation, the results, or this study in general, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully yours,

Sarada Mahtab

Supervisor Details:

Dr. Yu Hang

University of Gloucestershire

[redacted]

Prof. Sudha Tripathi (Ph.D.)
Rector
Tribhuvan University

Dear Mam

I am Sarada Mahtab, a doctoral student at the University of Gloucestershire. My research focuses on the leadership challenges faced by Nepalese women leaders of higher educational sector and how they overcome them. I am writing to request you to participate in this study and will appreciate your consent to be the interviewee for this study.

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If you have any further questions regarding your participation, the results, or this study in general, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully yours,

Sarada Mahtab

Supervisor Details:

Dr. Yu Hang

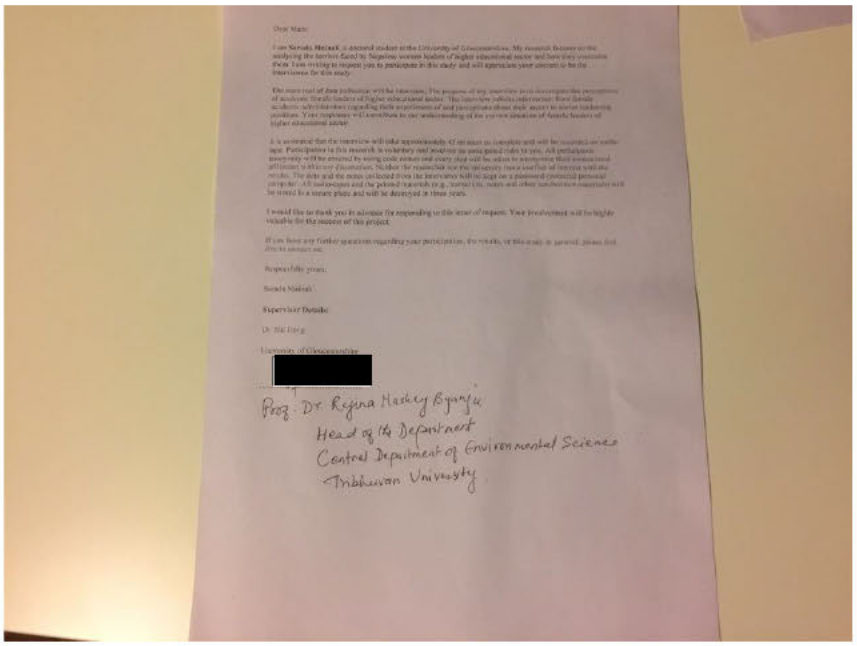
University of Gloucestershire

[redacted]

Chief
Coordination Division
TU Central Office

[redacted]

Sangita Pradhan (Tara)
Head of the Department
Central Department of Fine Arts



Dear Mam

I am Sarada Marasini, a doctoral student at the University of Gloucestershire. My research focuses on the analysing the barriers faced by Nepalese women leaders of higher educational sector and how they overcome them. I am writing to request you to participate in this study and will appreciate your consent to be the interviewee for this study.

The main tool of data collection will be interviews. The purpose of my interview is to investigate the perceptions of academic female leaders of higher educational sector. The interview solicits information from female academic administrators regarding their experiences of and perceptions about their ascent to senior leadership positions. Your responses will contribute to our understanding of the current situation of female leaders of higher educational sector.

It is estimated that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete and will be recorded on audio tape. Participation in this research is voluntary and involves no anticipated risks to you. All participants' anonymity will be ensured by using code names and every step will be taken to anonymize their institutional affiliation within my dissertation. Neither the researcher nor the university has a conflict of interest with the results. The data and the notes collected from the interviews will be kept on a password-protected personal computer. All audio-tapes and the printed materials (e.g., transcripts, notes and other handwritten materials) will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed in three years.

I would like to thank you in advance for responding to this letter of request. Your involvement will be highly valuable for the success of this project.

If you have any further questions regarding your participation, the results, or this study in general, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully yours,

Sarada Marasini

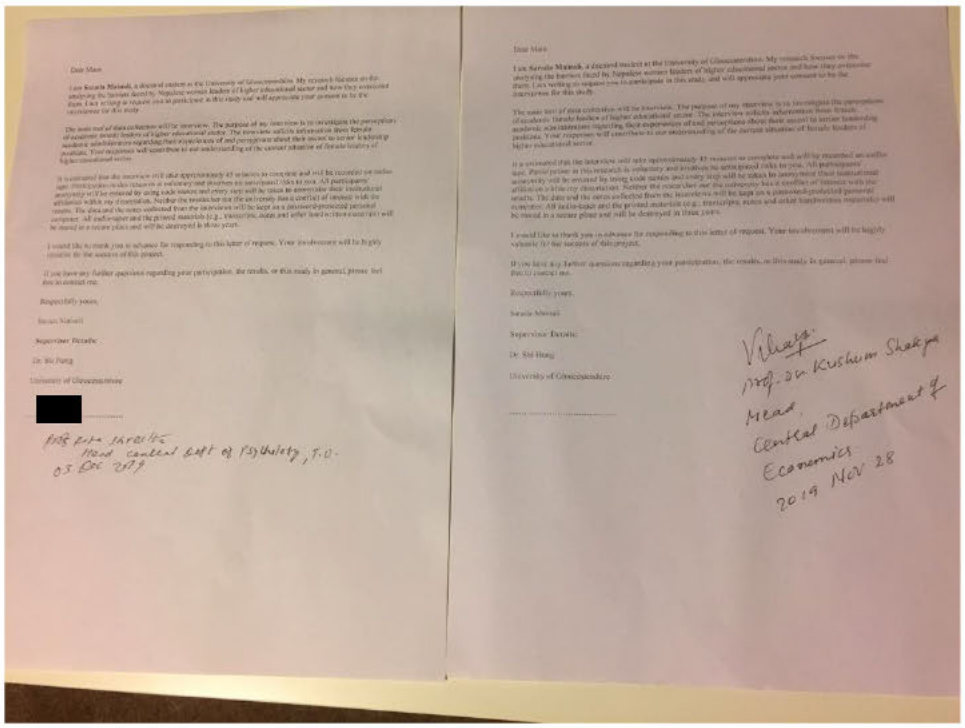
Supervisor Details:

Dr. Shi Hang

University of Gloucestershire

[redacted]

Prof. Dr. Regina Maskey Byanju
Head of the Department
Central Department of Environmental Science
Tribhuvan University



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I would like to thank you in advance for responding to this letter of request. Your involvement will be highly valuable for the success of this project.

If you have any further questions regarding your participation, the results, or this study in general, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully yours,

Sarada Marasini

Supervisor Details:

Dr. Shi Hang

University of Gloucestershire

[redacted]

Prof. Dr. Kushum Shakya
Head
Central Department of Economics
2019 Nov 28

# Appendix: 2

## Interview Questionnaire

Interview questions.

Name of interviewee:
University:
Post:

**Background Questions**

Age: 25-30
31-35
36-40
41-45
46-50
51-55
56-60
61-65
66-70

General questions

1. How long have you been in a leadership role?
2. What is your highest level of education?
3. How long have you been working in higher education?
4. What is your marital status? Single, Married, Widowed, Divorced, or Separated?

**Professional Questions**

1. Describe your career progression. Can you tell me what your career has been like at the university?
2. What is your experience related to advancing into a leadership position as a Nepali women academic leader?
3. What factors helped you in progressing into a leadership position?
4. What do you perceive the challenges that prevent Nepalese women from advancing to leadership roles in higher educational sector?
5. What experiences do you encounter that may be challenging for accessing senior roles in higher education?
6. How did you experience gender during your leadership career? Any examples?
7. In your experience, what are the abilities and characteristics that Nepalese women need to possess to be promoted into leadership roles?
8. Based on your experience, what are the training tools and programs needed to help Nepalese women advance into leadership positions with Higher education sector?
9. Do you think that the academic environment is supportive/un- supportive of female leaders? Any examples?
10. What internal or external factors based on your experience has influenced or lack thereof prevented Nepalese women from advancing to leadership in career colleges?
11. Historically, women who are married and/or have children have experienced barriers to advancement. Do you believe a woman's parental status is still a barrier to advancement?
12. What has been your experience of the process for promotion into a leadership role in the academic industry?
13. What strategy did you use in overcoming leadership challenges?
14. What do you consider as success factors for leadership development?
15. Have you been in active networking? Do you consider networking as success factor for career advancement?
16. With more women than ever enrolled and graduated from HE institutes, do you believe that will increase career advancement?

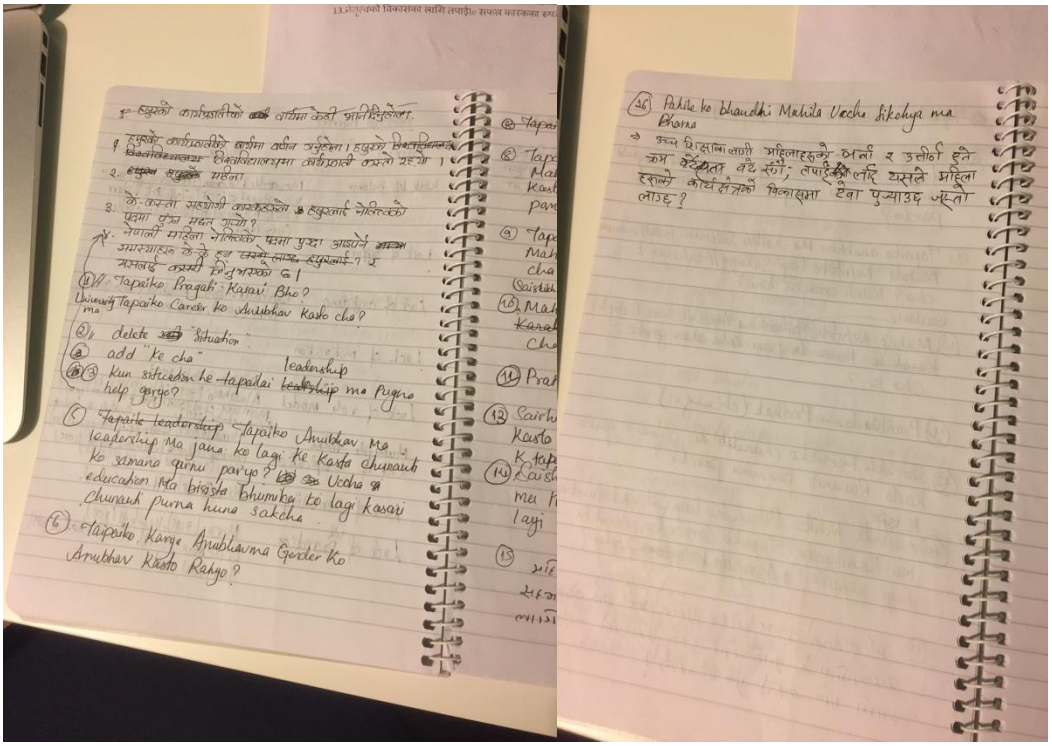
**Future Questions**

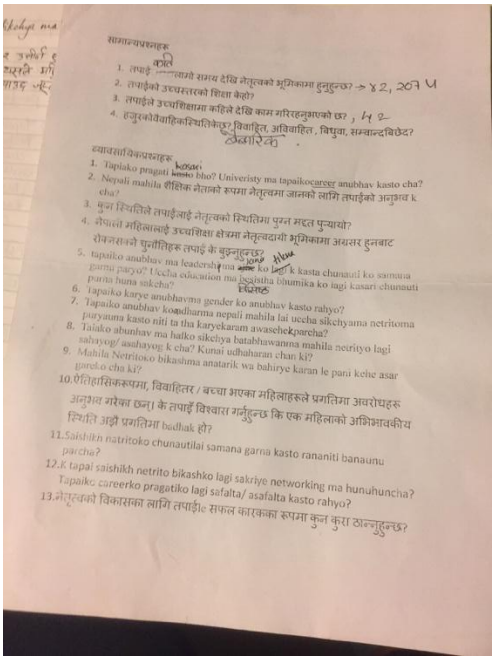
1. What are your plans?
2. Do you feel you could be a Vice-chancellor or chancellor? Are you interested in applying in those positions.
3. How can women's development and gender equality issues be enhanced in higher education sector of Nepal?
4. What advice do you give to the aspiring future women leaders?
5. Is there anything that you would like to add to inform in this research?

# Appendix: 3

Re-correction made to the questionnaire after feedback from a pilot study

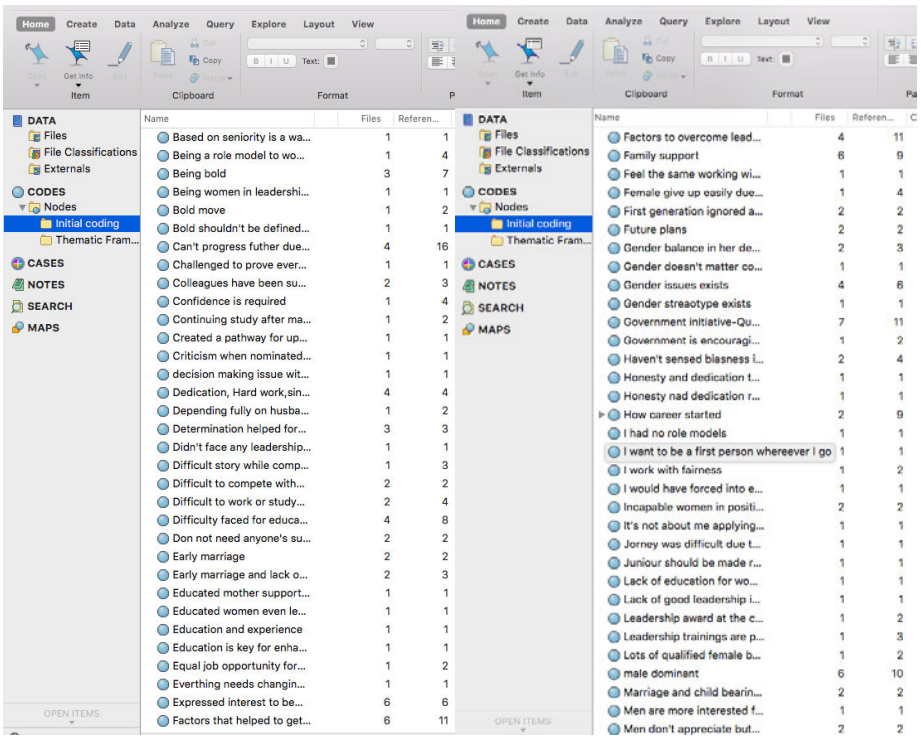
(This is all in Nepali as participants preferred the interview in the Nepali language)

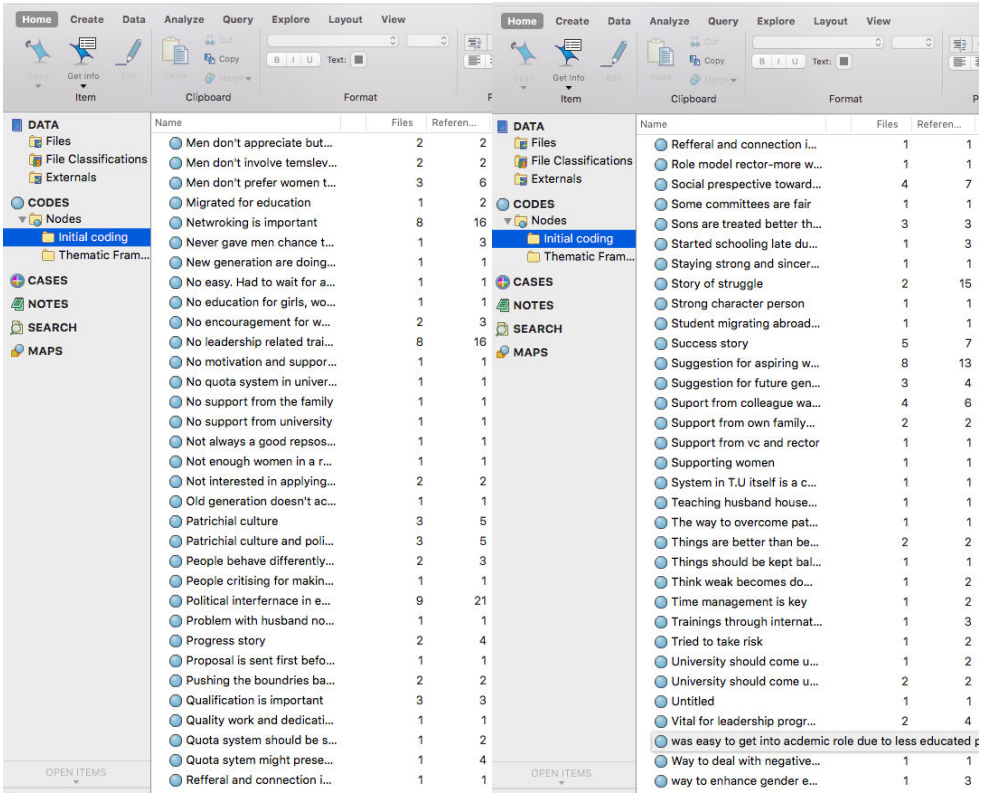


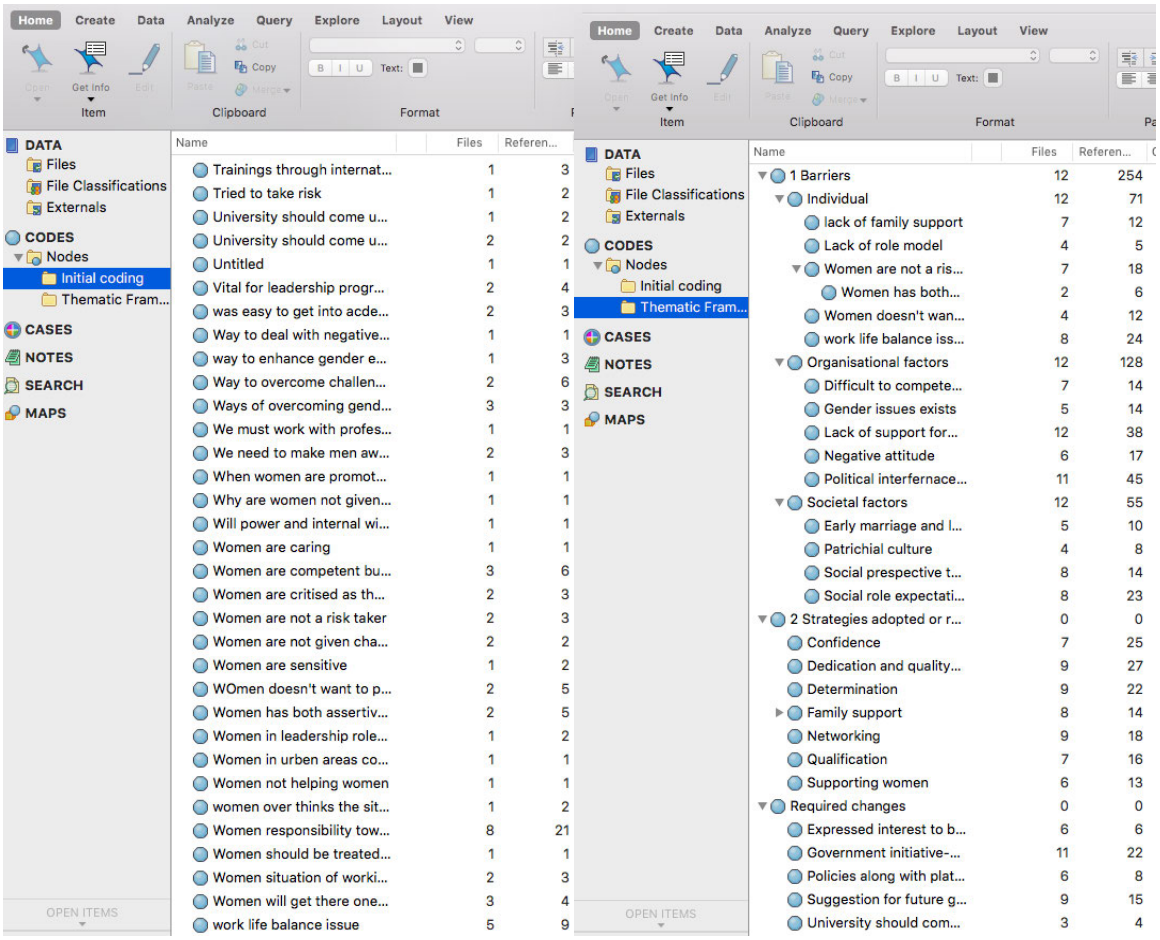


# Appendix: 4

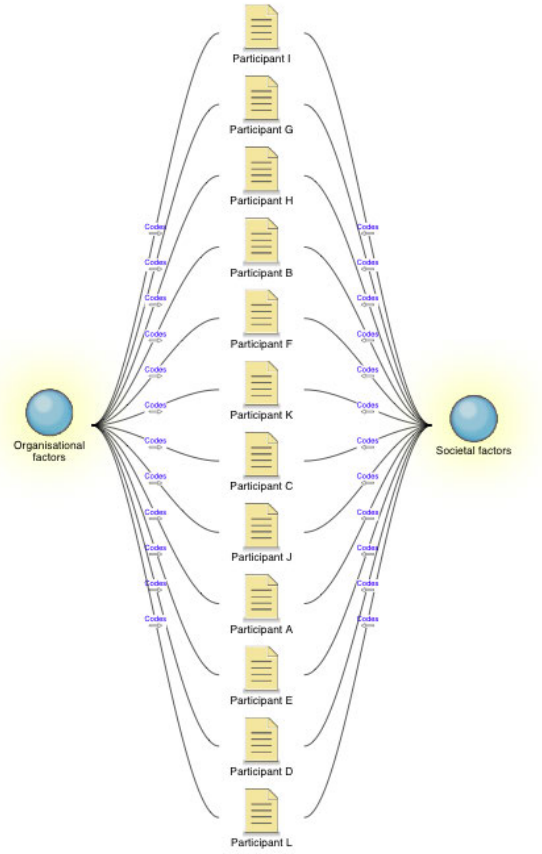
Nodes and Themes from NVivo

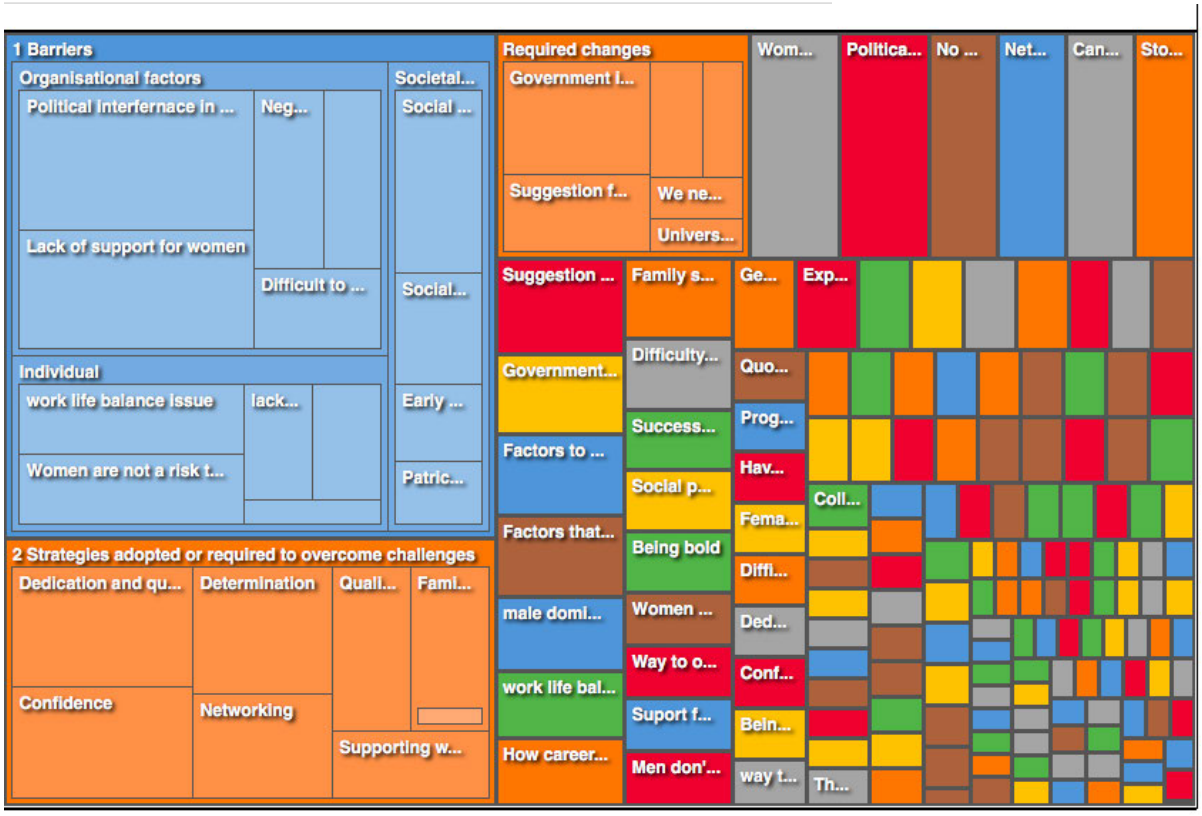





| Name | Nodes | Referen... |
|---|---|---|
| Participant A | 42 | 119 |
| Participant B | 44 | 89 |
| Participant C | 49 | 130 |
| Participant D | 42 | 100 |
| Participant E | 50 | 265 |
| Participant F | 51 | 126 |
| Participant G | 41 | 85 |
| Participant H | 49 | 135 |
| Participant I | 33 | 147 |
| Participant J | 38 | 67 |
| Participant K | 39 | 67 |
| Participant L | 64 | 140 |


Participant I
Participant G
Participant H
Participant B
Participant F
Participant K
Participant C
Participant J
Participant A
Participant E
Participant D
Participant L
Organisational factors
Societal factors


1 Barriers
Organisational factors
Political interfernace in ...
Neg...
Lack of support for women
Difficult to ...
Individual
work life balance issue
lack...
Women are not a risk t...
Societal...
Social ...
Social...
Early ...
Patric...
2 Strategies adopted or required to overcome challenges
Dedication and qu...
Determination
Quali...
Fami...
Confidence
Networking
Supporting w...
Required changes
Government i...
Suggestion f...
We ne...
Univers...
Suggestion ...
Family s...
Government...
Difficulty...
Factors to ...
Success...
Factors that...
Social p...
Being bold
male domi...
Women ...
work life bal...
Way to o...
How career...
Suport f...
Men don'...
Ge...
Exp...
Quo...
Prog...
Hav...
Fema...
Diffi...
Ded...
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way t...
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Politica...
No ...
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Sto...
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Th...

# Appendix: 5

## Interview request and research detail via email

Interview request Inbox ×

**Sarada Mainali** [redacted] 27 Nov 2019, 08:24

to sangita

Respected Mam,

As per our conversation this morning, I am sending you some details about my research.

I am **Sarada Mainali**, a doctoral student at the University of Gloucestershire. My research focuses on the identifying the barriers that hinder the advancement of women leaders in Nepalese higher education. The purpose of the study is to focus on the strategies that women have adopted to overcome personal and professional difficulties encountered, so that the participants' experiences can be presented and inspire current and future women leaders into the Nepalese higher education sector.

The main tool for data collection is interview which solicits information from female academic leaders regarding their experiences and perceptions about their ascent to senior leadership positions in details. Your responses will contribute to our understanding of the current situation of female leaders of higher educational sector and to inspire more women into academic leadership.

It is estimated that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete and will be recorded on audio- tape. Participation in this research is voluntary and involves no anticipated risks to you. Neither the researcher nor the university has a conflict of interest with the results. The data and the notes collected from the interviews will be kept on a password-protected personal computer. All audio-tapes and the printed materials (e.g., transcripts, notes and other handwritten materials) will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed in three years.

I am writing to request you to participate in this study and will appreciate your consent to be the interviewee for this study.

Regards,
Sarada Mainali

Research details Inbox ×

**Sarada Mainali** [redacted]

to rajani

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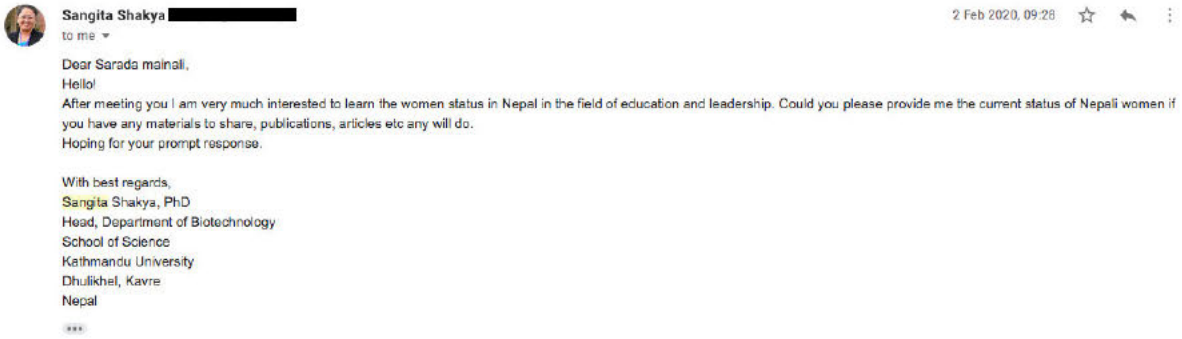
I am writing to request you to participate in this study and will appreciate your consent to be the interviewee for this study.

Regards,
Sarada Mainali

# Appendix: 6

## Appreciation and interest in the topic



**Sangita Shakya** [redacted] 2 Feb 2020, 09:28

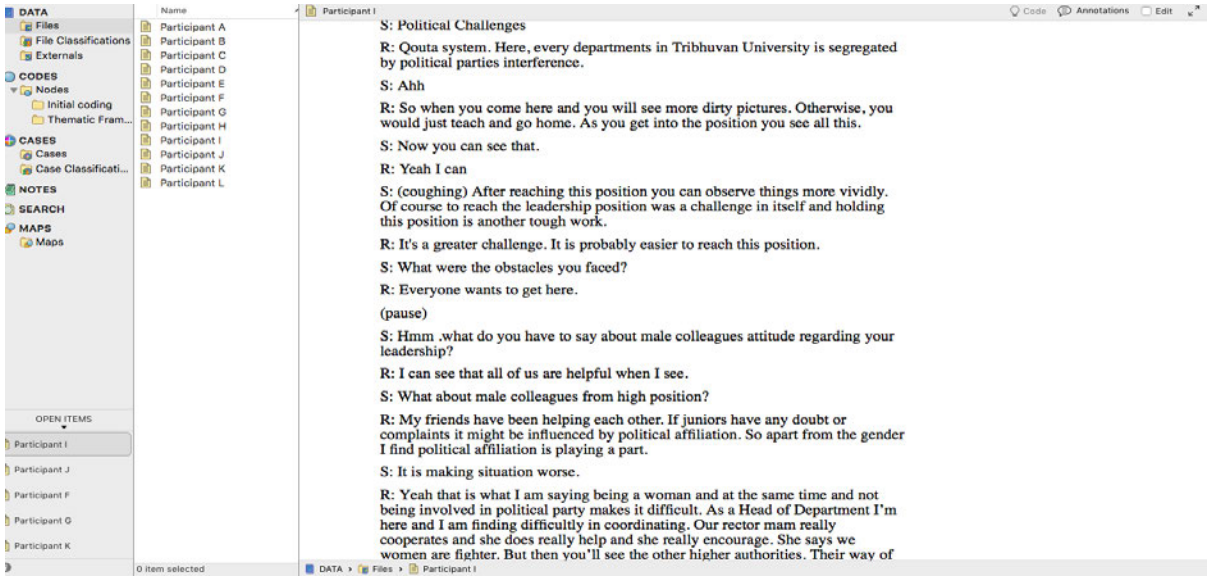
to me

Dear Sarada mainali,
Hello!
After meeting you I am very much interested to learn the women status in Nepal in the field of education and leadership. Could you please provide me the current status of Nepali women if you have any materials to share, publications, articles etc any will do.
Hoping for your prompt response.

With best regards,
Sangita Shakya, PhD
Head, Department of Biotechnology
School of Science
Kathmandu University
Dhulikhel, Kavre
Nepal

# Appendix: 7

## Interview Transcript (Randomly picked)



S: Political Challenges

R: Qouta system. Here, every departments in Tribhuvan University is segregated by political parties interference.

S: Ahh

R: So when you come here and you will see more dirty pictures. Otherwise, you would just teach and go home. As you get into the position you see all this.

S: Now you can see that.

R: Yeah I can

S: (coughing) After reaching this position you can observe things more vividly. Of course to reach the leadership position was a challenge in itself and holding this position is another tough work.

R: It's a greater challenge. It is probably easier to reach this position.

S: What were the obstacles you faced?

R: Everyone wants to get here.

(pause)

S: Hmm ,what do you have to say about male colleagues attitude regarding your leadership?

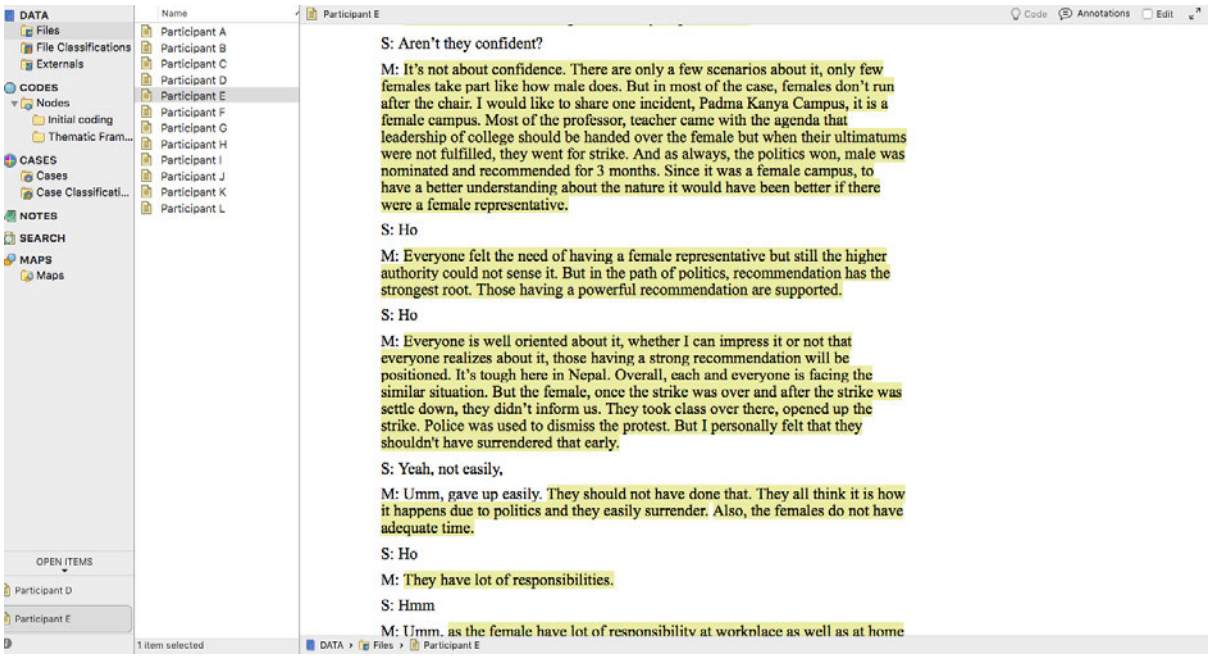
R: I can see that all of us are helpful when I see.

S: What about male colleagues from high position?

R: My friends have been helping each other. If juniors have any doubt or complaints it might be influenced by political affiliation. So apart from the gender I find political affiliation is playing a part.

S: It is making situation worse.

R: Yeah that is what I am saying being a woman and at the same time and not being involved in political party makes it difficult. As a Head of Department I'm here and I am finding difficultly in coordinating. Our rector mam really cooperates and she does really help and she really encourage. She says we women are fighter. But then you'll see the other higher authorities. Their way of



S: Aren't they confident?

M: It's not about confidence. There are only a few scenarios about it, only few females take part like how male does. But in most of the case, females don't run after the chair. I would like to share one incident, Padma Kanya Campus, it is a female campus. Most of the professor, teacher came with the agenda that leadership of college should be handed over the female but when their ultimatums were not fulfilled, they went for strike. And as always, the politics won, male was nominated and recommended for 3 months. Since it was a female campus, to have a better understanding about the nature it would have been better if there were a female representative.

S: Ho

M: Everyone felt the need of having a female representative but still the higher authority could not sense it. But in the path of politics, recommendation has the strongest root. Those having a powerful recommendation are supported.

S: Ho

M: Everyone is well oriented about it, whether I can impress it or not that everyone realizes about it, those having a strong recommendation will be positioned. It's tough here in Nepal. Overall, each and everyone is facing the similar situation. But the female, once the strike was over and after the strike was settle down, they didn't inform us. They took class over there, opened up the strike. Police was used to dismiss the protest. But I personally felt that they shouldn't have surrendered that early.

S: Yeah, not easily,

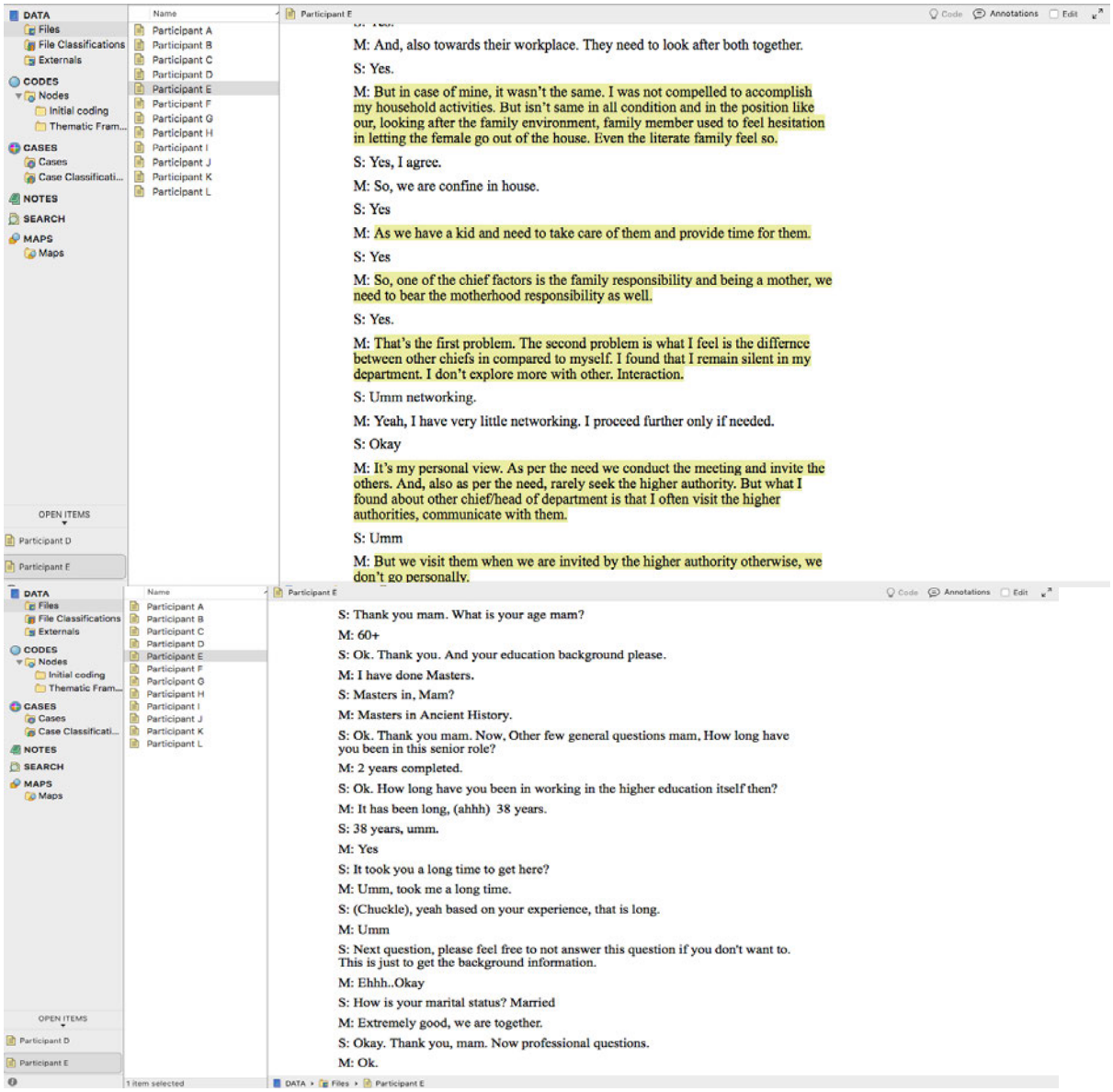
M: Umm, gave up easily. They should not have done that. They all think it is how it happens due to politics and they easily surrender. Also, the females do not have adequate time.

S: Ho

M: They have lot of responsibilities.

S: Hmm

M: Umm, as the female have lot of responsibility at workplace as well as at home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M: And, also towards their workplace. They need to look after both together.
S: Yes.
M: But in case of mine, it wasn't the same. I was not compelled to accomplish my household activities. But isn't same in all condition and in the position like our, looking after the family environment, family member used to feel hesitation in letting the female go out of the house. Even the literate family feel so.
S: Yes, I agree.
M: So, we are confine in house.
S: Yes
M: As we have a kid and need to take care of them and provide time for them.
S: Yes
M: So, one of the chief factors is the family responsibility and being a mother, we need to bear the motherhood responsibility as well.
S: Yes.
M: That's the first problem. The second problem is what I feel is the differnce between other chiefs in compared to myself. I found that I remain silent in my department. I don't explore more with other. Interaction.
S: Umm networking.
M: Yeah, I have very little networking. I proceed further only if needed.
S: Okay
M: It's my personal view. As per the need we conduct the meeting and invite the others. And, also as per the need, rarely seek the higher authority. But what I found about other chief/head of department is that I often visit the higher authorities, communicate with them.
S: Umm
M: But we visit them when we are invited by the higher authority otherwise, we don't go personally.
S: Thank you mam. What is your age mam?
M: 60+
S: Ok. Thank you. And your education background please.
M: I have done Masters.
S: Masters in, Mam?
M: Masters in Ancient History.
S: Ok. Thank you mam. Now, Other few general questions mam, How long have you been in this senior role?
M: 2 years completed.
S: Ok. How long have you been in working in the higher education itself then?
M: It has been long, (ahhh) 38 years.
S: 38 years, umm.
M: Yes
S: It took you a long time to get here?
M: Umm, took me a long time.
S: (Chuckle), yeah based on your experience, that is long.
M: Umm
S: Next question, please feel free to not answer this question if you don't want to. This is just to get the background information.
M: Ehhh..Okay
S: How is your marital status? Married
M: Extremely good, we are together.
S: Okay. Thank you, mam. Now professional questions.
M: Ok.
1 item selected
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