

**“I am a fighter” - Managers, lecturers or academics?
Hybrid and fragmented identities of female middle
managers within the context of the Institution-Wide
Language Programme**

Doctorate in Education

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Abstract

The existing literature on middle management in UK higher education recognises that, due to institutional neglect, workload intensification and role unpredictability, educational identities have become fragmented and unstable. The leadership experience of middle managers has been problematised further by recent organisational changes, resulting in the transfer to Academic Education Pathway (AEP) contracts and the addition of scholarship to management and teaching responsibilities. Although intended as an opportunity for career progression, it has also caused identity stress and regulation for middle managers. With gender being the particular focus of this enquiry, the study gives voice to the lesser-heard female middle managers of Russian and Arabic origin within the under-researched field of the Institution-Wide Language Programme of UK Universities. The study explores the complexities of women's leadership identity construction through the intersection of gender, culture and ethnicity.

The thesis employs a combined multiple-case and narrative inquiry approach to explore the leadership journeys and identity constructions of ten women. It is informed by the theoretical framework, consisting of four interrelated concepts – educational leadership, leadership experience, institutional/organisational change and dilemmatic identity. It is foregrounded by feminist poststructuralist theory and draws on educational leadership theory, gendered leadership experience, social role theory, discourse and identity, critical race and organisational culture and change theories. To fully explore the nuances and ambiguities of the women's stories, a four-stage analysis was employed, comprising thematic, positioning, and narrative components.

The study helps advance feminist poststructuralist theory and narrative methodology by revealing the transformative power of narrative in women's identity shift from powerless to agentive. It reveals the nature of the dilemmatic identity resisting or submitting to the institutional and patriarchal gender discourses, intellectual power hegemony, cultural gender stereotyping, academic exclusion, financial insecurity and contractual limitations at the time of organisational change. The findings have implications for policymakers in higher education management, human resources and mentorship.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AULC Association of University Language Communities

CercleS Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur

CPD Continuing Professional Development

FPDA Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis

HEA Higher Educational Academy

HE Higher Education

HEFCE Higher Education Funding Council for Education

HESA Higher Education Statistics Agency

IWLP Institution Wide Language Programme

LCTL Less Commonly Taught Languages

LWTL Less Widely Taught Languages

RQ Research Question

UCML University Council of Modern Languages

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This thesis amplifies the voices of female educational leaders from ethnic and cultural minority backgrounds within the UK Institution-Wide Language Programme (IWLP). It seeks to do so by exploring the boundaries to leadership identity development in relation to intersecting discourses of gender ideology, ethnicity, migration, postcoloniality, work-life balance, professional success, and leadership learning. Following the personal background and the problem outline, the next section will discuss the problematic areas of educational leadership in the context of UK IWLPs. This will be followed by further contextual information with a focus on leadership in the field of less commonly taught languages (LCTL), specifically Arabic and Russian. The chapter will conclude with an outline of the knowledge gap, research aims, and the contribution to new knowledge.

1.2. MY BACKGROUND

My interest in conducting this study stems from personal experience. Through both academic research and my leadership journey, I identified a significant knowledge gap concerning the barriers to career progression and the construction of leadership identity among middle managers from non-Western European backgrounds within the UK IWLPs.

Having worked in UK IWLPs for the past 27 years, I am currently leading a team of teachers and contributing to departmental educational policy and curriculum development. My research into teaching and leadership identity construction (Linaker, 2012, 2019, 2023a, 2023b, 2024) has made me aware of the need for further exploration of middle managers' hybrid identity. At the same time, my research into curriculum decolonising within the context of IWLPs (Richardson et al., 2024) has enabled me to identify a gap in the knowledge of leadership experience through curriculum change.

My educational leadership identity has been shaped through pedagogy underpinned by the scholarship on language teaching (Barkhuizen, 2017; Barkhuizen et al., 2014), multilingual teaching identity, gender and second language learning (Pavlenko, 2001) and professional gendered identity construction (Baxter, 2003; Holmes, 2006; Werbińska, 2015). My scholarly interest in the close interrelation between the personal and the professional in gendered identities (Menard-Warwick, 2009; Runte & Mills, 2004) has inspired my research on middle management leadership in the context of IWLP.

1.3. Problem outline

This thesis investigates the under-researched area of the problematic leadership experience of female middle managers of Russian and Arabic origin. The investigation hopes to contribute to tackling a wider societal problem of the factors contributing to the decline in foreign language learning in the UK (Kelly, 2018; Lanvers et al., 2021; Morgan, 2021; Tinsley, 2019), and in the context of IWLPs (Polisca, 2016; Rabadan-Gomez, 2023). The review of 134 UK universities highlighted that despite the universities' policies of internationalisation and globalisation, foreign language learning is not explicitly featured on their agenda (Lewis, 2021). Thus, the thesis aims to shed new light on the problem from the IWLPs leadership experience perspective, with a specific focus on two languages, which are considered less commonly taught (Drobnik-Rogers & Torres, 2024; Gor & Vatz, 2009), yet strategically important.

The research into UK universities' IWLPs has highlighted their two-fold commercial and academic educational goals (Bickerton, 2001) and their role in the internationalisation process (Dlaska, 2013). Recent research uncovered the IWLP's challenges of staff training (Leahy, 2006), programme limitations (Stefanutti, 2021), the need for innovation (Carson, 2010), and students' learning support (Drew & Ottewill, 2002; Ferney, 2004). Other problems pointed to students' dropout rates (Reimann, 2004) and skills development (Cervi-Wilson & Brick, 2016). However, the leadership of IWLP has not yet been under scholarship scrutiny. Yet, this investigation is important to ensure the success of the programme and its future.

Similarly, there was a substantial body of research on post-heroic (Andrews, 2016) and female leadership experience in UK higher education (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Other leadership studies explored the interplay between gender and power (Fletcher, 2004), work-life balance (Morley, 2013; Woodward, 2007), and women's career obstruction (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010). Further research revealed a lack of diverse representation (Netolicky, 2021), hidden sexism and marginalisation (Savigny, 2014) and gender-differentiated employment criteria (Vicary & Jones, 2017; Mavin & Yusupova, 2021). However, there has been no investigation into the educational leadership development of female middle-level leaders from non-Western European backgrounds who are unable to progress to senior leadership positions.

The thesis presents case studies of Arabic and Russian team leaders through the intersection of personal and professional aspects, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the

problems faced by the leadership of IWLP. The two main reasons for this focus are my affiliation with both teaching communities and the communities' links through the intersection of culture, gender and leadership. Existing research shows that gender stereotyping, gender asymmetry, and patriarchal gender ideology are experienced by both Arabic and Russian female professionals. This results in their conflicting role expectations and career limitations (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Koburtay & Abuhussein, 2021; Kuzhabekova & Almkhambetova, 2017).

The study considers all aspects of leadership identity as tightly interconnected and views identity construction from a feminist poststructural perspective, shifting the focus from gender only to culture and ethnicity, offering a feminist critical perspective on leadership in a specific educational context (Blackmore, 1999, 2013). The thesis examines the tension between stereotypical perceptions of leadership and the ethnic, gender and cultural identity construction of individual leaders in the context of IWLP.

This study adds new knowledge to the relatively small body of research on gender and intersectionality in educational leadership, reaching beyond culturally and racially neutral models (Moorosi et al., 2018; Showunmi, 2019, 2020, 2022). By examining the previously unexplored area of gendered educational leadership identity at the middle management level in a unique cross-cultural context, this study gives voice to a community of educators from a minority background. It is anticipated that the findings of this research will inform UK university policies on inclusivity, contractual regulations and staff development. The next section will contextualise the area of this research.

1.4. Context of the study

The study is set within the context of the Institution-Wide Language programmes (IWLP) (Bickerton, 2001) offered by the Language Centres and Language Departments in UK universities. These programmes are also referred to as University-Wide Language Programmes (UWLP) or Languages for All (LfA) programmes. For the purposes of this study, the generic term IWLP is used to represent the concept of foreign language provision across UK Universities. These programmes represent a community of over 70 members, united under the umbrella of the Association of University Language Communities (AULC), the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). These organisations are also linked with 300 language centres from 26 countries under the auspices of the Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement

Supérieur (CercleS), which provide professional support to language programmes through networking.

The IWLPs offer courses at different levels in a variety of languages to students on non-language degree programmes or additional language provision to students on language degree programmes. Thus, the IWLPs face several challenges due to the programme's unique positioning outside the traditional departmental framework as a service provider. This leads to the institutional identities of IWLP being unstable and hybrid, academic and non-academic, imagined and real at the same time (Billot, 2010).

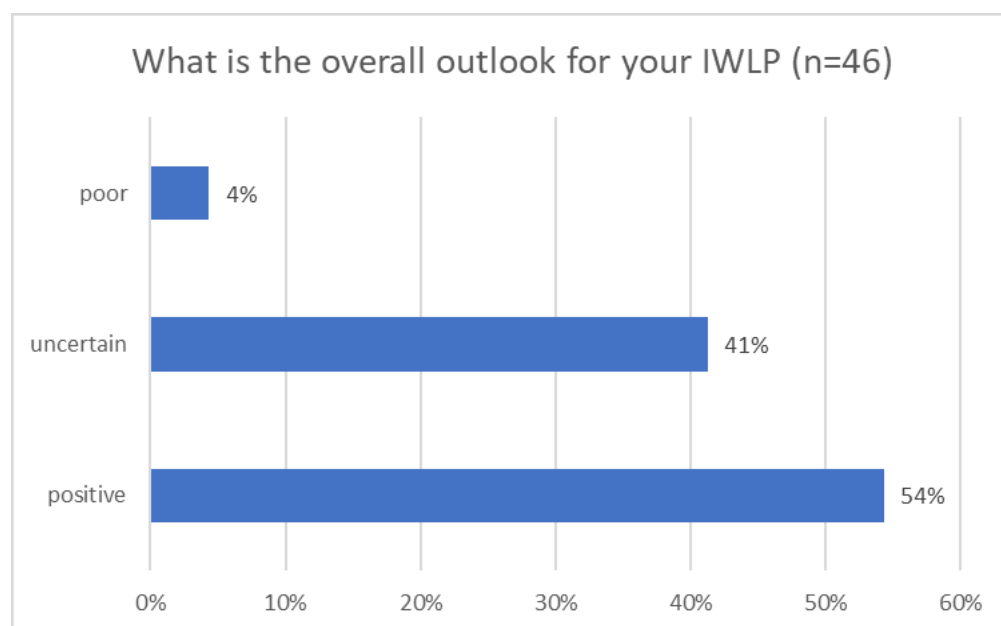
The funding structure of IWLPs is problematic due to its dependency on both internal and external factors, such as student recruitment for both accredited and non-accredited courses. This makes the programmes financially vulnerable, affecting teachers' job security, with some of them employed on zero-hour casual contracts. Under these conditions, neither the employers nor the employees have an obligation to each other, as the contracts can be terminated at any point, and the working hours can vary from one term to the next. Since these programmes are predominantly run by Language Centres, which rely heavily on external income from commercial language courses, the financial viability of the programmes becomes the main issue for the leadership (Howarth, 2014). Thus, the research into UK Universities' IWLP is timely and significant, particularly in the under-investigated area of leadership.

The general declining trend in UK higher education language provision and students' recruitment has been the biggest challenge for educational leadership. The drop in language provision was marked in 2021 as 36% since 2011 (Baker, 2021). The number of students in language and area studies has decreased by 3% in 2022/23, following a 5% decrease in 2021/22, with the largest decline in the East Midlands, East of England, and the West Midlands (HESA, n.d.). Additionally, the educational leaders of the IWLPs have been challenged by the negative effects of Brexit (Bowler, 2020; Kelly, 2018), the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK's exit from the EU and Erasmus programmes, affecting the universities' policies of globalisation, internationalisation, inclusivity and diversity (Kortmann, 2019). The low A-level language entries and changes in universities' curriculum towards optional language module selection have also affected students' recruitment (Critchley et al., 2021). The advances in technology, pedagogical innovations and the internationalisation of the student body have placed further demands on educational leaders (AULC-UCML, 2022).

The latest IWLP survey pointed to specific challenges reported by the programme leaders across the UK: lack of adequate funding, budget constraints, difficulty in developing higher language levels, lack of visibility within the institution and perceived lack of value in language learning among students (AULC-UCLM, 2024). Despite the internationalisation agenda of UK universities, languages are not always recognised as part of the institutional policy for employability and mobility (Lewes, 2021). The shortsightedness of this policy is revealed by the 2022 University of Cambridge report, which shows that the UK economy would gain an additional £19 billion in exports if there were no linguistic barriers to trade (Ayres-Bennett & Hafner, 2022). Another recurrent challenge is the lack of students' commitment towards their language course, affecting the employment conditions and morale of the hourly-paid staff (AULC-UCML, 2024).

Thus, although the majority of IWLP leaders felt positive about the future of the programme, a significant proportion reported uncertainty regarding the sector's outlook, as presented in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1. Prospects for IWLP (AULC-UCML, 2024)



Despite the need for collaboration between the Language Centres and Language Departments (Vogel, 2024) to improve language provision in line with the National Language Strategy (The British Academy, 2020), the relationship between the two entities is still tense and competitive, posing an existential threat to each other (Worton, 2009). The IWLP

provision has been under threat in recent years. The period between 2017 and 2019 has seen the closure of seven IWLPs. Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, five IWLPs have closed, with a further eight under threat of closure and redundancies (AULC-UCML survey, 2024). The proposed closure of the School of Modern Languages at Cardiff University, for example, will create a “cold spot” in language provision in Wales and has been met with a highly critical response from the academic community (Ayres-Bennett et al., 2025). The educational leaders have called for closer links between the Language Centres, IWLPs and Language Departments, and collaboration between the language specialist interest groups to improve foreign language provision in the UK (Dlaska, 2012).

Research shows that IWLPs will remain viable if they continue to offer a variety of languages, particularly those not taught by the specialist departments, described as less commonly taught languages, including Russian and Arabic (Bernhardt, 2007; Gor & Vatz, 2009).

However, despite the strategic importance of these languages, particularly for students’ enrichment and employability, they are not always recognised as such by the university’s management. Thus, the research into the leadership of IWLPs with a focus on specific language provision is timely and significant for UK universities’ student service-oriented policies. The next section will provide more details on Arabic and Russian provision in UK universities and identify the problems and challenges facing the leadership of these courses.

1.5. AREA OF INTEREST: CASE STUDIES OF ARABIC AND RUSSIAN LEADERS

1.5.1. Less commonly taught languages: focus on Arabic and Russian

While AULC annual surveys, conducted since 2012, report on the data across all languages taught on IWLPs, the scope of this inquiry is the provision of Arabic and Russian as Less Commonly Taught (LCTL), also referred to as Less Widely Taught (LWTL) languages within the programmes. These terms are interchangeable and are used for all languages which are underrepresented and limited in provision. This includes a limited number of teachers and students, availability of resources and funding (Gor & Vatz, 2009).

The educational leaders of Arabic and Russian teams are challenged by the shifting political landscape in the countries where the languages are spoken, and by the social, political, cultural and ideological relationships between those countries and the UK. The nature of these relationships has been integrated in all aspects of educational leadership: from recruiting students to training staff and designing the curriculum (Drobnik-Rogers & Torres, 2024). The demand for LCTLs such as Russian and Arabic is highly affected by the socio-

political, cultural and economic changes in the countries where these languages are used. Such motivational factors as interest in travel, business, heritage and culture have diminished since Brexit, the pandemic and the wars in Ukraine and Palestine (Drobnik-Rogers & Torres, 2024).

Although Arabic and Russian remain in the top eight credit and non-credit bearing modules on IWLPs, this offer has seen no growth for the past seven years. The provision of these languages is also restricted to mostly elementary level progression, with only one-third of the institutions offering these languages at an upper intermediate level. This limits the potential for students' international mobility, which requires a B2 level of language proficiency, according to the Common European Framework (AULC-UCML, 2024). Despite the proven employability value in learning these and other LCTL (Ayres-Bennett & Hafner, 2022), there is a significant oversight by the institutions in promoting these languages, as they are perceived as difficult for students to learn. At the same time, the under-recruited courses are costly for the management to run, which leads to their limited offer (Tinsley, 2019).

These findings are in line with the current trends of UK universities following the path of new managerialism, transforming universities into commercial enterprises controlled by performance-based incentives (Lynch, 2015). Another main issue is the lack of policies promoting heritage language learning (Gough, 2019, 2023; Parrish, 2024). Thus, the main challenge for the leadership of Russian and Arabic teams across all IWLP is to improve students' recruitment and progression to higher levels despite the lack of financial and marketing support from the university management due to the perceived lack of viability of these courses.

A recent study by Drobnik-Rogers and Torres (2024) has revealed further issues encountered by the leadership of LCTL teams, including Russian and Arabic, such as the unavailability of authentic and relevant teaching materials, and the need to develop new pedagogy and curriculum in line with the universities' decolonising agenda. These factors have reflected the lack of institutional understanding of specific requirements for teaching these languages, including pedagogy, mode of assessment and volume of teaching hours. The management drive for curriculum standardisation across all languages has also negatively affected students' and staff experience.

Other challenges for Russian and Arabic educational leaders have been recruiting and retaining qualified and experienced teaching staff. Two-thirds of all LCTL teachers are still

offered fixed-term or hourly-paid contracts, which makes their employment precarious and unstable (Drobnik-Rogers & Torres, 2024). There is an ongoing need for staff training and academic collaborations (Jenkins, 2018) despite the limited staff mobility due to geopolitical factors, and loss of the Erasmus exchange (Brandenburg et al., 2014).

While facing these challenges, there are examples of good practice which offer practical, forward-looking solutions for the universities to increase the provision of LCTL and Russian and Arabic in particular. The recent initiative of creating special interest groups for specific languages should help retain high-quality staff and create a sense of community for teachers and team leaders who often work in isolation (Drobnik-Rogers & Torres, 2024). However, the outcomes of these initiatives are yet to be surveyed. More managerial support is needed to put these initiatives into practice, including workload allocation for such collaborative activities. The next two sections will focus on the issues related to each of the languages taught and coordinated by the female leaders in this study.

1.5.2. Provision of Arabic

According to the latest AULC survey of 46 out of 60 IWLPs, Arabic is taught in 35 institutions (AULC, 2024), with nine UK universities offering Arabic as a degree (Complete University Guide, n.d.). Most programmes offer Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), often supplemented with some dialectal variation (Dickins & Watson, 2013). Demand for Arabic has fluctuated over time (HESA, n.d.), with a slight increase following the September 11th attacks in 2001 (Dickins & Watson, 2013). Despite the complex political relationship between the UK and several Arabic-speaking countries, interest in Arabic has remained relatively stable (Board & Tinsley, 2017). This stability is partly attributed to increased recruitment of Arabic-speaking students following the introduction of the Arabic A-level in 2019, as well as political and economic migration (Tinsley, 2019).

Arabic educational leaders are confronted by different pedagogical challenges, from offering Quranic and dialectal Arabic (Tinsley, 2019) to aptitude streaming for heritage speakers (ElHawari, 2020). Further challenges include incorporating Arabic diglossia (Ferguson, 2003) into the curriculum (Giolfo & Sinatora, 2018), developing an integrated approach to Standard and dialectal Arabic (Snowden et al., 2016) and widening participation initiatives to attract university applicants (Matras & Karatsareas, 2020).

These challenges have been exacerbated by the lack of support from senior management, increased workload and limited budget allocation for scholarship and collaborative activities,

thus requiring additional managerial efforts and emotional labour from the educational leaders (Soliman & Khalil, 2024).

1.5.3. Provision of Russian

Russian is taught in 30 out of 46 recently surveyed IWLPs (AULC, 2024). Russian teachers often teach on both IWLPs and degree courses where Russian is offered as a full or part of a degree (currently in 15 UK universities) (Complete University Guide, n.d.). Since IWLP and degree programmes often share staff members, it is pertinent to this study to provide an overview of the provision of Russian as a subject.

Russian studies have been part of the UK curriculum since the 19th century, with fluctuating levels of demand. Interest notably increased during the Cold War (Hayter Report, 1961) but declined in the mid-nineties following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Dunn, 2013). This decline was attributed to the phasing out of Russian in schools, reduced funding, and the closure of several academic programmes (HEFCE, 1995). In response, universities introduced combined and interdisciplinary degree programmes, as well as Language Centre courses, to sustain interest and provision (Hutchins, 2016; Nuffield, 2000). More recently, geopolitical developments have renewed interest in understanding Russian collective identity (Clunan, 2014; Malinova, 2014), contributing to a modest stabilisation in the provision of Russian studies (HESA, n.d.).

The effect of the current geopolitical crisis on Russian courses has not yet been identified fully. However, in response to sanctions and government directives, UK universities have severed institutional ties with Russian counterparts (Burakovsky, 2022) and discontinued student exchange programmes, which has negatively impacted the quality and breadth of Russian language courses (Moody, 2022). Educational leaders now face the dual challenge of declining student motivation and emerging Russophobic attitudes towards Russian language and cultural studies, despite the continued importance of maintaining academic collaboration and international partnerships (Fazackerley, 2022a, 2022b).

At the same time, there has been an increased development in area studies research and teaching, for example, in collective emotions and politics (Sharafutdinova, 2023), political leadership (Baturo & Elkind, 2021), autocracy (Greene & Robertson, 2022) and Russian contemporary society (Lankina, 2023; Smyth, 2023). These areas offer scope for educational leaders to promote further teaching of Russian culture, politics and society.

This rapidly shifting political landscape has also alienated Russian-speaking communities and posed challenges to Russian teachers' identity (Menter et al., 2017) and relationships between Russian and UK teaching communities (Sidorova, 2017). The partial alienation of Russian academics in the UK is particularly relevant to this study, as the participants are all members of the Russian communities of practice.

These challenges are further impacted by the societal discourse of the Russian-speaking diaspora, which has always been a fragmented and unstable entity (Nikolko & Carment, 2017). Russian educators, while being part of this diaspora, often perceive themselves as outsiders (Isurin, 2011), holding diverse political views (Byford, 2012). There has been no previous research on how the Russian educational leaders construct their identities in the adverse political climate, experiencing tension between their professional and personal affiliations. The dilemmatic nature of their identity (Bamberg, 2011), being part of the community, yet challenging some of its values, requires further investigation.

1.6. RESEARCH AIM, VALIDATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

The previous section has identified the knowledge gap in the problematic area of Russian and Arabic female leaders' identity formation against the institutional, societal, political and personal challenges. Thus, the thesis aims to gain an insight into the leadership experience of a middle manager in the context of UK university IWLPs and to develop scholarship on culturally specific gendered professional identity construction through small story analysis (Bamberg, 2006). This study is relatable within the context of IWLPs and is validated through the participants' personal and professional educational discourse. The study is important because it makes a contribution to knowledge on educational leadership identity construction by offering a platform for minority voices to be heard and acknowledged, by investigating the problem using novel methodology and by informing the policy and practice to empower women in their career progression.

1.7. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This chapter has introduced the overall thesis. Chapter 2 will present the conceptual framework underpinned by the core theories and the existing literature. The literature review will draw on the empirical and theoretical studies and identify the research gaps related to the problem. Chapter 3 on methodology will present the research questions, research paradigm, framework and methods. It will provide a rationale for the chosen data

collection tools and analysis techniques to ensure the research's rigour and trustworthiness. It will also outline the researcher's positionality and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 will present the findings and answer the research questions. Chapter 5 will provide further discussion and interpretation of the findings and reflect on the connections to the relevant theories and previous research. The researcher's positionality will be further discussed and reflected upon. Chapter 6 will present the conclusion, which will summarise the main findings, outline links to theories, research significance, limitations and contribution to knowledge, policy and professional practice.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

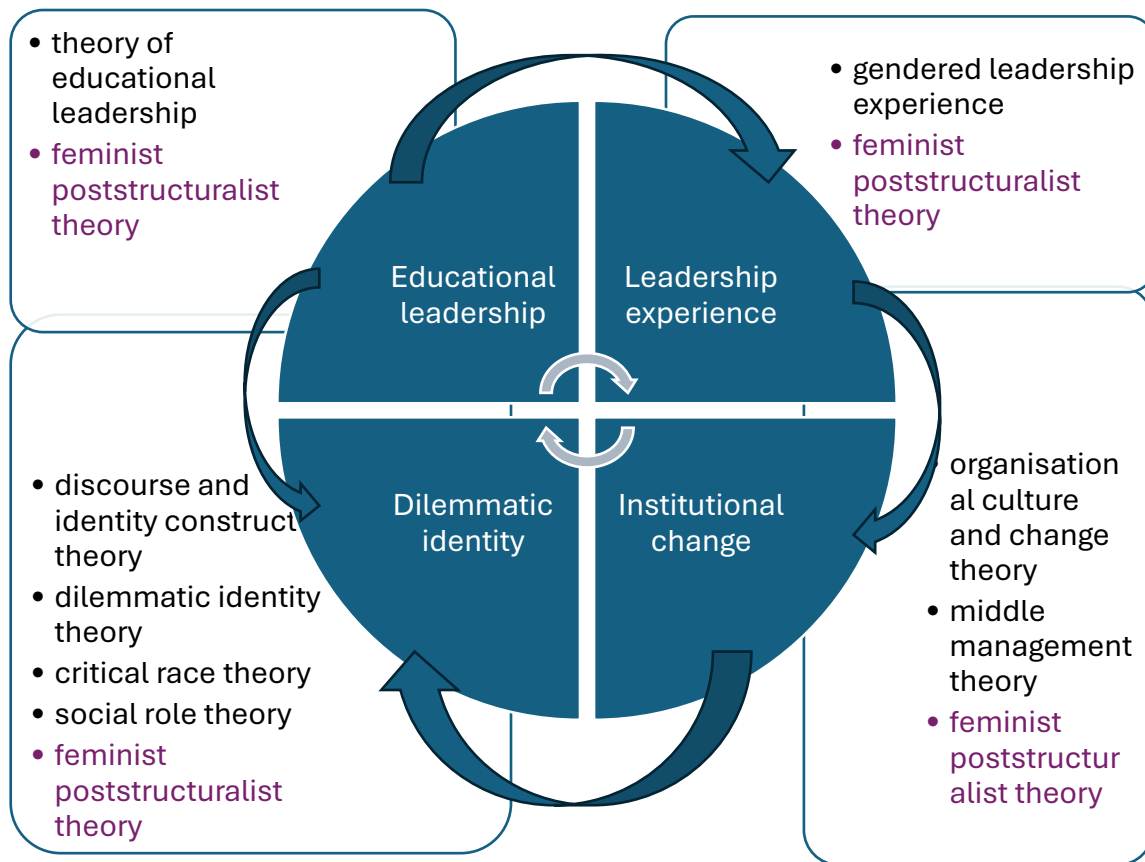
2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a conceptual and theoretical framework and reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, which foregrounds the thesis. The main aim of this review is to build a foundation for the thesis by linking theories to previous investigations. The review also aims to demonstrate the knowledge gap and the way this study can advance it. Finally, this chapter will conceptualise the rationale for the thesis and provide a reference point for the findings' interpretation (Merriam, 2014).

2.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNED BY THEORIES AND LITERATURE

This study is framed by four interrelated concepts – educational leadership, leadership experience, institutional change and dilemmatic identity. The main Feminist Poststructuralist theory underpins them, but the conceptual framework is also driven by Educational Leadership theory, Gendered Leadership Experience, Social Role Theory, Discourse and Identity Construction, Dilemmatic Identity, Critical Race Theory and Organisational Culture and Change (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework underpinned by theories



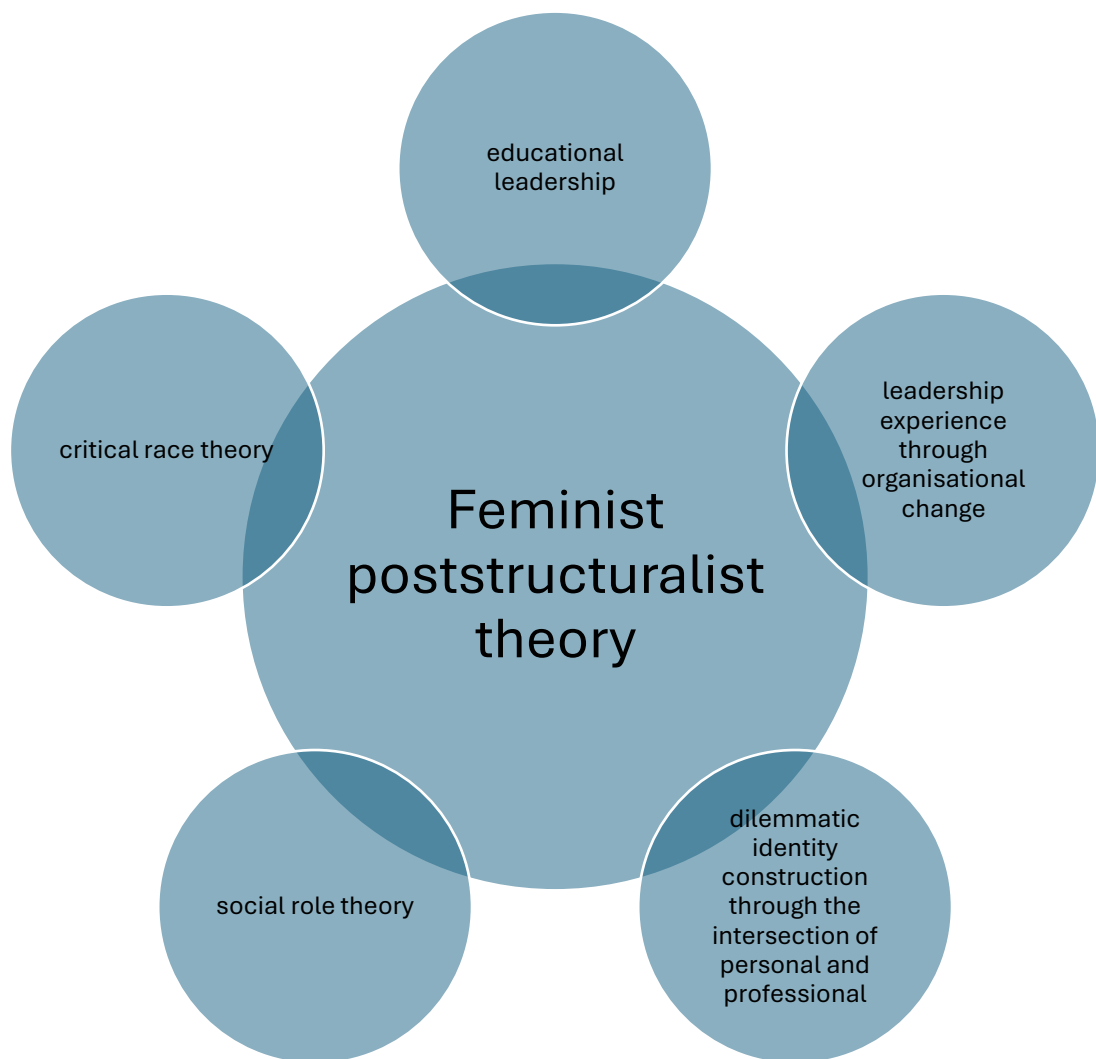
The reviewed literature framed by the interrelated concepts highlights the significance of the current research on gendered leadership experience through organisational and curriculum change. It also identifies the knowledge gap of cultural/gendered/ethnic intersectionality in educational leadership and identity construction.

These concepts emerged from the survey of theoretical perspectives, empirical literature, my personal experience and my previous research into gendered leadership identity construction (Linaker, 2012, 2019, 2023a, 2023b, 2024a, 2024b). By adopting this deductive theory-testing approach (Trafford & Leshem, 2009), the proposed conceptual framework combines the concepts of identity, leadership, institutional change and experience. It connects theory, research strategy and design and gives significance to the data. At the same time, I intend to make a unique contribution to knowledge by exploring the understudied

areas in search of emergent theory (Cresswell & Poth, 2018), which would be at the cross-section of the theories tested by the research. Therefore, I consider the conceptual framework to be the guiding principle, which grounds this study and defines the relationship between the existing theories (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009).

In order to demonstrate the linkage and cohesion between the conceptual and theoretical framework and existing literature, I chose to use a Venn diagram, which allows for the complexity and interplay of theories to be discussed and for the knowledge gap to be identified (see Figure 2.2). This approach has an advantage over the hierarchical structure of literature review, due to the in-depth review of the intersections where theories supporting my research overlap.

Figure 2.2. A Venn diagram of the intersection between the theories



The sections below discuss the theories which foreground the thesis and the intersections between them.

2.3. FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORY

Feminist poststructuralist theory is adopted as the overarching theory which foregrounds all aspects of this study, including formulating research questions, modelling research design, collecting and analysing data and interpreting the findings. It intersects with critical race theory through race, class, and ethnicity (Baxter, 2002, 2003; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

Feminist poststructuralist scholars drawing on critical race theory recognise that women in leadership often face intersecting forms of oppression rooted in racial, ethnic, and gender biases (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Consequently, their work seeks to empower marginalised voices, challenge dominant power structures, and expose systemic inequalities (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). Feminist poststructuralism has been selected as an overriding theory supporting my research and grounding my positionality in conjunction with other theories. Here, I provide the rationale for this selection by engaging with existing theoretical and empirical literature.

Feminist poststructuralist theory offers a compelling framework for educational leadership research, as it emphasises the researcher's self-reflexive positioning and active, agentic engagement within the research process. It is framed by the Critical/Transformative paradigm and influenced by critical education research aimed at restoring social justice (Habermas, 2022; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Murphy, 2013). The methodology used within this framework is associated with communities of practice, aiming to bring emancipatory policy changes (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). At the same time, this framework is not dogmatic, but subject to critical enquiry (Cohen et al., 2018), as it considers the dichotomies of oppressed versus privileged, democratic versus autocratic through a fluid poststructuralist lens (Guba & Lincoln, 2013).

Due to the multiplicity of feminist theories, feminist epistemology can be best defined as a stance or a standpoint (Crasnow, 2008; Hekman, 1997; Mosedale, 2014). It views identity through language use (Burr, 2015), negotiating tensions between leadership, gender and culture (Ford, 2006). However, the epistemological positioning of feminist poststructuralism

can be ethically challenging when boundaries between the researcher and the researched are not clearly defined (Gillies & Alldred, 2012).

Poststructuralism, founded by Derrida, Lacan, Kristeva, Althusser and Foucault (Foucault, 2018; Kristeva, 2004; Murphy, 2013), is concerned with social power, exercised through interrelations between gender, class and race (Weedon, 2006). Therefore, in order to challenge the existing power imbalance, feminist poststructuralist scholars need to analyse the language of societal and political discourses and understand how they are reproduced (Weedon & Hallak, 2021). Thus, social reality is perceived as meaningful only through language, while meaning is plural and always deferred (McQuillan, 2007; Tallis, 2016).

At the same time, poststructuralists believe that language can gain power only through action, performed by an individual who is both subjective and affected by societal discourses (Weedon, 2006). Therefore, language is embedded in social institutions, which exercise power through discursive fields (Foucault, 2018). Thus, feminist poststructuralism relies on the concepts of language, discursive fields and subjectivity to identify and challenge power imbalance (Weedon, 2006). The interplay between these concepts can be exemplified by a narrative study of an emerging agency of a Muslim woman confronted by the sexist and religiously discriminatory discourse. The detailed linguistic analysis demonstrates how the societal and political institutions produce and reproduce the discourse of ethnic, racial and religious marginalisation, while the narrative gives voice to the individual combating this discourse (Weedon & Hallak, 2021).

The feminist poststructuralist paradigm is interpreted differently depending on the type of feminism, whether the focus is on ethnicity, race, social justice, or disability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). This multiple positioning (Fuller, 2018) has allowed for a more nuanced exploration of not only marginalised groups but also multiple identities within these groups (Olesen, 2011). Two major strands of feminism have emerged in the past 20 years: indigenous/decolonising and intersectional (Olesen, 2011). Both strands, in conjunction with critical race theory, contribute to the intersectional educational leadership research by de-centring the power hierarchies and driving the social justice agenda.

While recognising the theory's principle of intersectionality in rebalancing power, critical engagement with some other principles is important. The criticism of the performative principle of the theory is twofold. On the one hand, while acknowledging gender's performative aspect (Butler, 2006), there is a danger to the feminist equality agenda caused

by obscuring gender as an aspect of identity (Jurik & Siemsen, 2009). On the other hand, reducing gender to biological sex only can obscure other identity categories (Bradley, 2007). The principle of reflexivity has been criticised for the potential risk of power imbalance between the researcher and the researched and the reproduction of hegemonic structures (Pillow, 2003). The transformative principle is also critiqued for the lack of significant policy-making changes resulting from action research (Cohen et al., 2018). Additionally, the feminist poststructuralist definition of agency as irrational, incoherent, multiple and discursive is problematised by the fact that it can be exploited by late capitalism through perceived freedom of choice, thus forfeiting the feminist agenda (Davies, 1991; Davies et al., 2006).

However, some other critical claims against the theory have been refuted. The claim of the pre-determined researcher's positioning (Cohen et al., 2018), privileging one discourse over another (Hammersley, 2013), is counter-balanced by the claim that unbiased, value-free research perpetuates the existing status quo and fails to expose inequality (Baxter, 2003). The critique of the enquiry's deconstructive aim (Lincoln & Guba, 2013) is rejected based on the researcher's self-reflexive stance and conscious rebalancing of powers (Baxter, 2003). Closely related to these problems is the aspect of voice. The inclusion of the polyphony of voices as a methodological tool can ensure that the voice of the researcher does not overpower the voice of the researched (Ellis & Brochner, 2006; Pierre, 2000, 2008).

The diversion from Eurocentric to Global World feminism has driven the decolonising agenda of higher education in recent years. For example, postcolonial feminist research has been used for transforming Anglo-Eurocentric publication culture (Messer-Davidow, 2002). While the postcolonial feminism is associated with the third world feminism (Coleman, 2017; Smith, 1987), there is a need for a better understanding and embracing the differences between the geographical and economic positioning of the two worlds (Weedon, 2007). This includes, for example, a critical examination of racism and colonialism by a white Western woman, using language as an empowerment tool (Davies, 1991).

Foucault (2018) argues that transformative action can be achieved by agents critically reflecting on themselves and discourses through a poststructuralist lens (Foucault, 2018; Weedon, 1997). However, the concept of agency is paradoxical – on the one hand, it is produced by dominant discourses and on the other hand, it critically analyses these discourses and changes them through language use (Davies, 1991; Davies et al., 2006). To reconcile this paradox is to acknowledge that the poststructuralist subject is messy and

incomplete, situated within a local and specific context (Pierre, 2023). It is also ambivalent, as it is both the effect of the existing power relations and the condition for change (Butler, 1996). Thus, the transformative challenge of feminist poststructuralists is not only to make sense of ourselves but also to develop strategies for breaking free from the dominant structures, for example, through collective biographical writing (Davies et al., 2006).

2.3.1. FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALISM APPLIED TO EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

This section provides a review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literature on educational leadership through the application of feminist poststructuralist theory to emphasise the link between the two. It will also identify the gap in the knowledge of cultural/gendered/ethnic intersectionality in the context of higher education leadership.

Feminist poststructuralist theory applied to educational leadership implies that leaders are not fixed, pre-conceived identities, but perform their leadership roles through various discourses (Niesche & Gowlett, 2019). They act against the discourse of masculine hegemony and traditional gender ideology (Alvesson & Billing, 2014; Zhao & Jones, 2017), shifting the focus from gender only to other aspects of identity (Blackmore, 2013). Educational leadership theory views leadership through a post-heroic lens, attributing female leadership traits to the ability to foster co-creation and collaboration inspired by shared ideas (Kempster et al., 2021).

The feminist poststructuralist framework has been successfully applied to investigating problematic areas of women's educational leadership. These include the gender gap in senior leadership and perceived leadership expectations against normative gender performances (Ibarra, 1999; Jones & Clifton, 2018; Manfredi et al., 2019). The other commonly investigated problems are lack of job security, occupational stress, gender bias, misrecognition of competencies and unsustainable work/life balance (Morley, 2014, 2016; Woodward, 2007). This thesis draws on the scholarship exploring the barriers to women's success when caught between two "greedy organisations" – their careers and personal lives (Morley, 2000b, p.3).

Thus, the feminist poststructuralist approach used to analyse the accounts of international female leaders reveals multiple and contradictory positionings towards academic leadership, constrained by normative leadership practices (Morley, 2014). Similarly, the study of female educational leaders in Chinese higher education reveals a problematic perception of leadership as secondary to traditional gender roles, leading women to reject leadership positions (Zhao & Jones, 2017). However, the intersectional side of this problem within UK

universities, with the focus on motherhood in academia, related to gender misrecognition, cultural sexism, exploitation and career limitations (Morley, 2016) is still an under-researched area.

The application of this theory has revealed the masculine leadership discourse (Harley, 2003) obstructing women's careers (Doherty & Manfredi, 2010) and contributing to a disproportional representation of male over female executives (McTavish & Miller, 2009; Burkinshaw et al., 2018). The recent educational leadership scholarship has uncovered other barriers to female leadership, including misogyny (Morley, 2011, 2013), marginalisation and gender bias (Savigny, 2014).

Further research identifies gender-differentiated employment criteria (Vicary & Jones, 2017), essentialist gender perception in competitiveness (Mavin & Yusupova, 2021) and gender career disadvantage (Deem, 2003). Other studies have identified recurring phenomena that disadvantage women in education (Holmes, 2006; Nixon, 2017), including the "think manager, think male" paradigm first coined by Schein (1973, p.99), the double bind (where women are expected to be both professional and feminine) (Mullany, 2022), and the double burden (the dual demands of domestic and skilled labour) (Cotterill & Letherby, 2005).

The interplay between leadership and gendered identity has been well documented. Research views post-heroic leadership as less masculine (Billing & Alvesson, 2000) and more relational, collaborative and distributed (Fletcher, 2004). Women experience leadership by influencing others (Andrews, 2016) to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2016). They learn to lead through lived experience and observation (Kempster, 2006; Kempster & Steward, 2010). They develop authentic leadership (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), performed through collaborative networks (Fletcher, 2004) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2004).

At the same time, by stereotyping women's ability to be more collaborative, empathetic and relational, women leaders are denied other types of leadership, essentialised based on gender difference (Jones, 2020). Similarly problematic is the tokenism in promoting women to senior leadership positions, which can be as precarious as a glass cliff and doomed to fail (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Peterson, 2016). This serves the deficit principle of gender theory, which perceives women as deficient, requiring improvement through self-development, mentoring programmes and networking (Jones, 2020).

Feminist poststructuralist and educational leadership theories coincide in the view that female educational leaders are emerging agents initiating change (Harris & Jones, 2019; Kempster, 2006) by being inspirational, innovative and motivational (Kitchin & O'Connor, 2015). However, while recognising feminine leadership traits as powerful capital (Elliot & Stead, 2008), research into understanding female leadership nature (Olsson & Walker, 2003) has also revealed gender fatigue of constructing a gender-neutral workplace and facing discrimination (Kelan, 2009). Another problem results from the incongruity between a traditional female gender role and stereotypical leadership behaviour (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This often leads to a backlash for displaying power (Brescoll, 2011), identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), identity control (Alvesson et al., 2008), emotional labour (Iszatt-White, 2009) and emotional management (Hochschild, 2012).

To conclude, feminist poststructuralism views educational leadership beyond leading groups of individuals, but leading ideas, connecting the personal and the social, exploring the tension between stereotypical gender roles and post-heroic leadership (Elliott & Stead, 2008). While the outcomes of these studies shed light on female leadership experience through a feminist poststructural lens, there is insufficient research into power relations and gendered practice in UK higher educational leadership in culturally specific contexts, particularly at the level of leadership identity. More empirical evidence is needed to find out how women from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds experience leadership and learn to lead, which this thesis explores.

2.3.2. Feminist poststructuralism and postfeminism applied to intersectionality and postcoloniality

Given the intersectional and postcolonial focus of this study, it is important to understand postfeminism as a theoretical perspective that complements, rather than contradicts, poststructuralism. On the one hand, the prefix “post” can be understood as an epistemological break away from the essentialist tradition of feminism (Brooks, 2001), thus implying the successful outcome of the feminist movement and the end of inequality and patriarchal oppression (Kelan, 2009; McRobbie, 2009). It is also viewed as an object of critical analysis of postfeminist culture and a backlash against feminism (Gill, 2016; Gill & Scharff, 2013).

At the same time, a perception that all the battles have been won (Gill, 2014; Lewis et al., 2017) can obscure the power imbalance and render certain inequalities invisible. This can

occur through attributing discrimination to factors other than gender (Gill, 2014). Thus, the paradoxical nature of postfeminism is that women are being agentic, while at the same time disempowered by societal discourses (Jones & Clifton, 2018; McRobbie, 2009). This phenomenon is often linked to neoliberalism (Gill, 2014). While fostering a discourse of meritocracy and egalitarianism, it can also perpetuate neoliberal sexism (Genz & Brabon, 2018), emphasising women's personal development as a means for achieving success (Lewis et al., 2017).

While women gain access to structures and hierarchies (Blackmore, 2013), feminist educational researchers (Acker, 2012; Acker & Wagner, 2019) have revealed the practice that favours masculine leadership behaviour. This is proven by the cross-cultural underrepresentation of women in educational leadership (Lyle & Macleod, 2016). At the same time, when given the opportunity, female educational leaders often act as change agents against the hierarchical, masculine environment, developing a new leadership paradigm (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). While being authoritative in their roles, they are also caring and nurturing, striving to address educational inequities (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Further research is needed into cultural feminism, which recognises that male and female leadership traits are enacted differently across different cultural contexts (Adams, 2009).

While the concepts of postfeminism, neoliberal feminism and popular feminism are closely interrelated (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020), they are all critiqued for ignoring the existing gender, race and class inequalities (Liu, 2023). As a result, the recent revival of feminist activism, such as the Me Too campaign, which contradicts the postfeminist and neoliberalist ideas (Rottenberg, 2019), is indicative of the perpetual struggle for power balance.

At the same time, if viewed from a different epistemological perspective, such as the third wave or the continuous development of feminism, postfeminism presents a natural progression of the feminist movement (Gill & Scharff, 2014; Gill, 2014). Thus, it engages with postcolonial, postmodern and poststructural theories, giving voice to indigenous, diasporic, postcolonial, and culturally diverse feminisms, through the intersection of race, ethnicity and class (Brooks, 2001). In this definition, postfeminism fits this study's research agenda.

The drive for equality and diversity in education has highlighted the need for a deeper engagement of educational leaders with internationalism to avoid the reproduction and normalisation of white privilege (Gardner-McTaggart, 2021). The concepts of multilevel distributed educational leadership (Alfadala et al., 2021) and Islamic leadership, which

inspire trust, harmony, relationality, and spirituality (Netolicky, 2022), need further investigation in the move to deconstruct homogeneous Western leadership theory in favour of the more inclusive, diverse, and egalitarian way of leading.

Thus, the new strand of postcolonial feminism contests the Western ontological positioning (Blackmore, 2013) and brings educational research into a culturally, racially and ethnically specific focus (Moorosi et al., 2018; Showunmi, 2019). It also explores the tension between the stereotypical perception of leadership and individual leadership experience (Alvesson & Billing, 2014; Zhao & Jones, 2017), thus contributing to the feminist poststructuralist theory.

To conclude, feminist poststructuralism and its postcolonial strand, framed by the intersectional and transformative agenda to empower minorities, make a strong contribution to the theoretical paradigm of my thesis. This section has identified the gap in research on identity formation in a culturally specific context (Showunmi, 2019, 2020, 2022) of ethnically and culturally underrepresented groups of educational leaders.

2.4. SOCIAL ROLE THEORY APPLIED TO LEADERSHIP CONTEXTUALISED BY ARABIC AND RUSSIAN CULTURES

Social role theory believes that gender stereotypes develop from the gender division of labour acceptable in a particular society. While men are more associated with instrumental task-oriented social goals, women stereotypically perform more traditional homemaking, nurturing and emotional roles (Eagly, 1982; Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Eastwick et al., 2006; Koenig et al., 2014).

This section will explore how social role theory interacts with the leadership culture of Russian and Arabic societies and why this is important for this study. The societal discourse of predominantly masculine hegemony in the workplace and traditional caregiving and home-making gender roles assigned to women, permeating Russian and Arabic cultures, is reflected in the studies of leadership. This thesis draws on research into the cultural experience of female leaders of Arabic and Russian origin in the UK and leadership in Arabic and Russian-speaking countries.

The challenges that female leaders of Muslim background face in the UK range from underrepresentation to gendered-Islamophobic micro-aggressions and tokenistic representation leading to career obstruction (Ramadan, 2022). At the same time, they

uncover the ways women face these and other challenges through agency negotiation, engaging in personal networks and using individual strategies (Tariq & Syed, 2017).

The need to lift the barriers for women in leadership has led to research into women encumbered by traditional gender ideology through societal perception, gender segregation, religion, and male guardianship (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Recent studies reveal the tension between discriminatory gender practices and gender parity in egalitarian Islamic laws (Koburtay & Abuhussein, 2021). The research in a Saudi Arabian university context has documented a heavy workload due to multiple administrative and managerial roles women leaders undertake (Alsuheam, 2018). At the same time, there is evidence of female leaders' agentive actions despite restrictions placed by societal conservatism in Qatar (Bahry & Marr, 2005). Further research found women confronting traditional cultural, religious and gender discourses by developing an intrapersonal identity through teacher education in the UAE (Clark, 2008).

Poststructuralist scholarship on challenges faced by Arabic female academics has revealed that Western leadership ideology comes into conflict with Islamic culture and societal expectations, shifting the focus from the male/female binary. The research set in a UAE University uncovered the phenomenon of "sisterarchy" when women discriminate against other women, preventing them from leadership advancement due to gender biases and societal expectations (Davis et al., 2016, p.55). Other studies in higher education uncovered inequality and oppression in the Arabic patriarchal societies, reinforced by the glass ceiling effect (Cotter et al., 2001). Further research revealed female leadership exclusion on the grounds of the so-called comfort principle - the society being more comfortable with male leaders (Turner, 2014, 2015). The cited research indicates that there is a small body of scholarship with a feminist poststructuralist angle, confirming that cross-cultural racial and gender biases prevent women from career progression in education in Arabic-speaking countries. However, there have been no similar studies in the UK; thus, further research is needed to hear the diverse voices of Arabic educational leaders both in the UK and internationally.

Female educational leaders in Russian-speaking countries encounter similar issues related to societal role expectations, resulting in leadership self-doubt (Beattie, 2020; Reznik et al., 2017; Rimashevskaja, 2011; Temkina, 2010; White, 2005). Confronted by essentialist power structures, they struggle to perform leadership roles and develop new forms of agency

(Holmgren, 2013; Lezhnina, 2014; Zhrebkina, 2003). Additionally, they are having to deal with the legacy of the Soviet gender paradox – labour equality without domestic equality (Ashwin, 2000; Ashwin & Isupova, 2018). To my knowledge, there have been no previous studies of Russian leaders within the UK higher educational context.

To conclude, the literature reviewed in this section identified a gap in the knowledge of Arabic and Russian educational leaders' identity construction within the context of UK HE, viewed through the prism of social role theory.

2.5. CRITICAL RACE THEORY APPLIED TO THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE AND CURRICULUM REVIEW

This thesis took inspiration from the political campaign against colonial legacy in education (Liyana, 2020) and in favour of inclusive education (Coleman, 2017; Higginbotham, 1990) with a non-Eurocentric focus (Alvares & Faruqi, 2014). The current student-led anti-racist postcolonial movement in HE (Hussain, 2023) has been supported by critical race theory, which considers race to be a social construct interacting with other identity aspects (Delgado et al., 2017). The theory aims at elevating the voices of racial minorities, making education inclusive through diversifying pedagogies and improving accessibility. Thus, curriculum decolonising, which includes both content and pedagogy, has been the mission of UK universities' leadership in the past few years (English & Heilbronn, 2024). This mission also includes reviewing language teaching curriculum through a decolonising lens. Therefore, critical race theory in education (Amiot et al., 2020; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Parker & Villalpando, 2007) underpins this thesis.

Curriculum decolonisation is inextricably linked with the historical, socio-political and cultural factors affecting leadership identity of Arabic and Russian educational leaders. The overarching aim of curriculum review is to decentre normative hierarchies of power by deconstructing the historical colonial norms (Criser & Knott, 2019; Fomunyan, 2019) and changing the dominant Eurocentric ontological positioning (Arday et al, 2021). This involves critical interrogation of the historical patriarchy, imperialism, colonialism, white supremacy and capitalism (Arday, 2018) to end the dominance of Western values and beliefs (Dale-Rivas, 2019; Liyana, 2020). Ultimately, this review aims to facilitate an epistemic positioning change to improve the representation of minority ethnic staff and students and inspire transformative action (Charles, 2019). For the leadership of IWLPs, decolonising or decentring the curriculum means also maintaining and expanding the range of languages

taught and providing equal value to commonly and less commonly taught languages (Critchley & Wyburd, 2021).

However, despite decolonising becoming a main educational trend in the past few years (Ferguson et al., 2019; Moncreffe, 2022; Moncrieffe et al., 2024; Richardson et al., 2024), there is a significant knowledge gap in how managers lead on Arabic and Russian curriculum reviews. This study will fill the gap in research on how the decolonising curriculum requirements in higher education impact leadership experience.

2.5.1. Decolonising the Arabic curriculum

Decolonising the Arabic curriculum includes two aspects – pedagogy and content, i.e. the way we teach and what we teach. Decolonising teaching pedagogy, which stems from the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 2014) and critical race theory in education (Ladson-Billings, 2009), is particularly relevant to the Arabic leaders. While promoting a decolonising agenda, they acknowledge the tension between the need to separate languages from their colonial past and to strive for globalisation (Kramsch, 2019). They aim to overturn the historical hierarchy of language and power (Bock & Stroud, 2021) and unsettle the dynamics of the educational context.

The educational leaders are guided by a postcolonial scholars' review of historical, literary, and cultural texts within the framework of nationalist, feminist, and anti-racist movements, using Foucault's philosophy to critique the history of European representation of the Arab world (Foucault, 2018; Kerr, 1980; Said, 1978). The review of US-produced Arabic textbooks, for example, reveals neo-colonial practices, which serve the political interests of the hegemonic class (Columbu, 2022). Thus, this agenda has supported the politicised nature of Arabic language teaching (Said, 1978) developed during the Cold War period (Heller & McElhinny, 2017).

The hegemonic Eurocentric and American view of the Middle East has dominated the Arabic teaching resources used by the UWLPs until recently. The colonial attitudes reflected in these resources position the Arabic-speaking countries in a subordinate social and political role compared to the Western world (Keskin, 2018). Thus, despite some innovative developments in Arabic pedagogy and the use of an integrated approach to include Arabic dialects, educational leaders face the challenge of decolonising the curriculum content (Giolfo & Sinatora, 2018). Specifically, this challenge involves reflecting the diversity of the UK student population and meeting their requirements for learning the language and culture (Sholihin et al., 2024).

al., 2025), confronting reverse privileging of formal discourse over informal in teaching resources (Byrnes, 2002; Ryding, 2013), and deconstructing methodology (Haleem, 2020).

2.5.2. Decolonising the Russian curriculum

While colonial legacies are embedded in the Arabic curriculum, the notion of decolonising the Russian curriculum remains contested due to divergent scholarly perspectives on Russia's colonial history. Some believe that Russia has not yet reached the postcolonial moment (Adams, 2008), while others refer to Russian internal colonisation as a historical socio-political practice (Etkind et al., 2012).

As an alternative to Western postcolonialism based on state-sanctioned racism (Du Bois, 2020), the Russian curriculum is viewed within a post-socialist framework (Chari & Verdery, 2009), based on Marxism (Burawoy, 2001). This framework offers a critical perspective on the legacies of state socialism. Decolonising the Russian curriculum is also problematised by the perceived exceptionalism of inter-ethnic relations without racial prejudices and discrimination (Bulatova & Glukhov, 2018). However, despite the general denial of the existence of racism within Russia, there is an emergence of research into prejudice and discrimination against people of non-Slavic appearance (Yusupova, 2021).

Thus, decolonising is viewed from opposing ontological positionings. They range from accepting Russia's colonial past as liberation, to the russification and enculturation of ethnic minorities. This leads to the formation of a super ethnicity of Russians united by history and common language (Rodionov, 2023). In this way, Soviet Russia is viewed as the anti-imperialist alliance of the oppressed (Putz, 2022). Other scholars recognise the Soviet period of forced russification of education across all ethnic groups as the period of recolonisation (Buketov, 2022). Further studies consider the problematic issue of post-Soviet integration of ethnic minorities' languages and cultures into the educational system, and the centralised role of Russian in higher education as a postcolonial legacy (Nasibullov & Kopylova, 2022; Romaniello, 2019).

The current conflict in Ukraine adds further complexity to the anti-colonial discourse within Russia (Saveliev, 2022), including decolonising research methods (Morris, 2023) and creating new alternatives to Western educational models (Olga et al., 2021). The challenges that Russian educators face include limited cultural, linguistic, gender and ethnic minority representation in the teaching resources, reflecting the policies of language purification,

cultural unification (Chevalier Ab Imperio, 2005), homo/trans-phobic policies in Russia (Healey, 2022; Suchland, 2018) and enforced heteronormativity (Scheller-Boltz, 2018).

Thus, the deficit of identity representation, particularly at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, race and social status, negatively affects students' motivation (Ehrlich, 2001; Polanyi, 1995). This presents an additional challenge for educational leaders, who aim to boost their students' motivation by fostering intercultural awareness (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004).

This thesis investigates how the identities of Russian educational leaders are shaped by decolonising discourse and curriculum reform, as they attempt to separate politics from language and culture while maintaining professional ties with colleagues based in Russia (Menter et al., 2017). To conclude, there have been no previous studies interrogating the ways educational leaders engage in the decolonising agenda and how they promote research, training and reflective practice of curriculum review among their teams. Thus, there is a need to bridge this knowledge gap, which this study attempts to do.

2.6. FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORY APPLIED TO THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN IDENTITY, DISCOURSE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

2.6.1. Identity

This thesis explores gendered educational identities within a poststructural framework, which posits that such identities are open to multiple interpretations (Murphy, 2013) and are discursively constructed within specific contexts (Antaki & Widdicombe, 2008; Blommaert, 2005; Gumperz, 1982). Feminist poststructuralist theory regards identity as fluid (Bucholtz & Hall, 2022) and shaped by culture and language (Nunan & Choi, 2010). Within this context, identity is viewed as dilemmatic (Bamberg, 2011), acting across three main socio-cultural tensions: being stable yet changing, being unique yet the same as others and being agentive yet constrained by the societal discourse.

The study draws on research into the dilemmatic teacher's identity: being stable and changing at the same time (Werbińska, 2015), being within and outside the community of practice (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992), being agentive, yet constrained by the dominant gender ideology (Baxter, 2003). Other identity studies reveal the dilemmatic nature of educational identities as true versus mistaken, necessary versus unnecessary, desirable versus undesirable (Clarke, 2008), and emotional versus agentive

(Kayi-Aydar, 2019; De Costa & Norton, 2017). The thesis also draws on research in foreign language teachers' identity construction through the lens of intersectionality, emphasising its plurality (Barkhuizen, 2017; Gallardo, 2019; Kayi-Aydar, 2019). This is explored through the analysis of autobiographical narratives (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) and small stories (Linaker, 2012, 2019, 2023).

Viewed through the poststructuralist framework (Morgan, 2004), the educational identity studies uncover the way gender intersects with other aspects in the contexts of competing discourses and ideologies (Tao & Gao, 2017). Thus, educational leadership is revealed through intersection with ethnicity in the UK (Arday, 2018; Johnson, 2017) and gender in the USA contexts (Livingston et al., 2012). However, there is insufficient research on the intersection between gender, ethnicity and leadership in the UK educational environment.

Despite the volume of recent research on dilemmatic identity, there is a gap in the knowledge of how identity submits or resists the societal discourses in particular educational contexts. Thus, the study fills this gap by uncovering nuanced identity work through the intersection of leadership, gender, culture, and ethnicity.

2.6.2. Discourse

Feminist poststructuralist framework views discourse as a means of identity construction and meaning making (Archakis & Tsakona, 2012; de Fina et al., 2006) achieved through linguistic resources (Cameron, 2001; Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 2018) and performative acts (Butler, 2006). However, there is a distinction between discourse as interactive practice (little d) and societal Discourse (big D) as a discourse of ideologies, which affect and are affected by humans (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Gee, 2014) and which are pertinent to this study.

The discourse of gender permeates all stages of this enquiry. It draws on research in gendered leadership identity interaction with discourses of culture and ethnicity (Ford, 2006), the concept of doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), female versus male interactions (Gumperz, 1982; Tannen, 1994) and gatekeeping (Holmes, 2007). The studies relevant to this enquiry have revealed how gender is constructed through social and workplace interactions (Baxter, 2003; Cameron, 2001; Coates, 2004; Ely, 1995; Holmes & Schnurr, 2006; Holmes, 2007), conforming to or transgressing societal expectations (Litosseliti, 2014).

This thesis is informed by the scholarship on leadership, gender and cultural discourses in education (Collard & Reynolds, 2004). It also draws on sexist discourse (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Jones & Clifton, 2018) and the discourse of autonomy (Gill, 2014), which makes sexism invisible (Gramsci et al., 1971) and perpetuates the egalitarian myth (Gill, 2014). It is also concerned with the interaction between personal and professional discourses related to domestic versus paid employment (Runte & Mills, 2004) and with the discourse of difference (Kendall & Tannen, 2015).

2.6.3. Intersectionality

Intersectionality of leadership identity is the focal point of this enquiry (Crenshaw, 1991). It distinguishes between critical (multiple aspects of the oppressed identity), celebratory (racial and gendered characteristics interacting positively), and conflicted intersectionality (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021). It is the latter, conflicted intersectionality, which opens space for further investigation.

The most recent empirical studies into intersectionality of leadership, gender, class, religion, race, language and ethnicity have identified hybridity as an innovative and constructive identity aspect coming to the fore in culturally diverse and gendered institutional contexts (Holmes & Marra, 2011; Vine, 2017; Wodak, 2015). The research conducted in the Middle Eastern contexts, for example, has revealed that despite religious and cultural stereotypes, female leaders can perform leadership identities with assertiveness and confidence within specific communities of practice (Baxter & Al A'ali, 2014; Metcalfe, 2007; Sadiqi, 2003). For example, the study of migrant professionals interacting with communities of practice makes visible how the difference in educational, ethnic and national backgrounds of the women positions them as either powerful or powerless, through the narrative storytelling (Clifton & Meeroop, 2017).

Research into the intersection between leadership, race and gender in African American education (Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011) has uncovered some problematic areas in cultural identity misrepresentation related to historical racism and sexism. Other studies reveal the perpetuation of white privilege and male dominance (Young & Skrla, 2003). In the past few years, the studies foregrounded in critical race and feminist theories have come to prominence. For example, cross-cultural analysis of women leaders in higher education (Bagilhole & White, 2008) and institutional practices of gendered racism (Henry, 2015). However, in addition to existing scholarship (Arday, 2018; Watson & Normore, 2016), further

research is needed to critically examine the experiences of racially and ethnically diverse female leaders in higher education.

Other recent intersectional empirical studies, pertinent to this inquiry, are set in international academic contexts. They report problematic leadership experiences of women confronting masculine leadership discourse and a lack of work/life balance (Işık-Guler & Erdoğan-Ozturk, 2022) or negotiating a reversed gender bias towards their ethnic identities in Belgium (Jacobs et al., 2022). The intersectional research into the interaction between gender, leadership and family in the contexts of the Middle East, India, the USA and Nigeria has identified similarities in gender role stereotyping and the male-dominated hegemonic notion of leadership (Schnurr, 2022). At the same time, the study of Muslim women in educational leadership in some Middle Eastern countries has uncovered the pragmatic and resilient ways they advance their careers while fulfilling traditional gender role expectations (Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

Further studies are needed into how female educational leaders negotiate intersectional aspects of identity to advance social justice, particularly in the under-researched culturally specific educational settings, such as IWLPs in UK universities.

2.7. MIDDLE MANAGERS' IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AT A TIME OF ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

This research into professional leadership identity is contextualised by the organisational culture of the IWLP and adopts the feminist poststructuralist framework to explore the way the research participants – female middle managers - interact with this culture. Specifically, the thesis investigates the ways the participants resist or submit to the organisational discourse of change, due to the introduction of new employment contracts, combining leadership, teaching and research. This section will review the literature, supporting the theories which frame this research: organisational culture, organisational change and middle management.

2.7.1. Professional identity in interaction with organisational culture

The main concepts contributing to the current UK university's culture are often deemed to be neoliberalism, new managerialism and governmentality. Neoliberalism is viewed as a socio-political ideology of a free-market economy adopted by universities to ensure financial stability (Lynch, 2014; Lynch & Ivancheva, 2015). New managerialism is the organisational mechanism transforming universities into commercial enterprises through performance-based incentives (Lynch, 2015). Governmentality is the control mechanism for university

performance measurement based on the market and competition and is related to Foucault's idea of the act of government (Foucault, 2018; Morrissey, 2013).

This study builds upon the previous research into the ways professional identity interacts with organisational culture. Although there is a lack of an explicit approach to the definition of professional identity in higher education (Trede et al., 2011), this study considers professional educational identity through the feminist poststructuralist lens as negotiated through social and political discourse (Varghese et al., 2005). The concept of organisational culture remains contested and is described by some as a system of shared values and beliefs (Owens & Valesky, 2011). These values are collectively formed and developed in response to external or internal challenges to the organisation (Schein, 2010).

Organisational culture is also perceived as a dynamic process, rather than a static being (Bagilhole, 2002). The most significant scholarship views organisational culture from the male dominant perspective, as hierarchical and designed to serve male interests (Acker, 1998; Benschop & Bronds, 2003; Blackmore, 2013; Deem, 2003; Kitchen & O'Connor, 2015). Within this framework, universities are viewed as chilly organisations for women who experience leadership barriers (Britton, 2016; Currie & Thiele, 2001; Hall & Sanders, 1982; Hearn, 2001) and are not admitted into a boys' club (White, 2003).

The cross-national study of the gendered aspect of university culture at the senior management level concludes that although managerialism favours gender parity in leadership, academia as a social institution remains patriarchal. Women are being perceived as problematic in having to balance domestic and leadership responsibilities (O'Connor, 2011). Another study of gendered leadership in academia across three continents – Australia, Canada and the UK – reveals that women need to play strategic games in the new managerial culture to survive (Acker, 2010).

However, this study departs from the dominance model and aligns with the feminist poststructuralist framework, which views university organisational culture not just indexed by gender but also by other societal, cultural and political discourses. Therefore, it is important to consider the way organisational culture interacts with individuals within a societal context (Staber, 2013), as in the study of women academics doing gender through the intersection of gender, age and race, while aligning with the managerial discourse (Acker, 2012). Another feminist poststructuralist study demonstrates the fluidity of gendered

leadership performance of resisting or submitting to the discourse of marketisation and managerialism (Thomas & Davies, 2002).

Recent research into professional academic identity in UK higher education views it through the interplay between culture and socialisation (Floyd & Morrison, 2014), participating in multiple communities of practice. The research reveals the tension between faculty culture and individual departmental cultures (Alvesson, 2002; Knight & Trowler, 2000; McAleer & McHugh, 1994).

The organisational discourse within post-1992 UK universities has been accompanied by a shift in managerial culture. There has been a tendency towards commercialisation, staff contractual restrictions and greater accountability for both teaching and research (Deem, 2004). The fostering of close links between professional development, teaching and research has been the main target for universities. However, this interaction has been a subject of policy-making controversy. This is due to teaching and research being considered as separate activities competing for state funding (Hughes & Tight, 1995), with research being traditionally favoured over teaching (Taylor, 2003).

The tension between teaching and research has been further exacerbated since the introduction of the Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) in 1992. This scheme applied generic, quantitative performance indicators without accounting for the distinct contexts of individual institutions or addressing the broader dimensions of the student experience (Barnett, 1992; Middlehurst, 1992; Yorke, 2000). As well as creating a compliance culture - complying with external demands at all costs (Barnett, 1992; Yorke, 2000) - the Teaching Quality Assessment has put further pressure on the institutions to address the equality of teaching and research (Drennan, 1998).

However, despite the increased profile of teaching in recent years, research output remains the primary criterion for career progression in academia (Drennan, 2001). Consequently, several strategies have been proposed to strengthen the teaching–research nexus, including the integration of student-centred research activities and the use of teaching practice as a subject of scholarly inquiry (Hughes & Tight, 1995). Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that excellence in teaching should be better rewarded on a par with research (Drennan, 2001).

Driven by the need to achieve greater synergy between teaching, research, and management, universities have widely implemented policies aimed at enhancing teaching

practices, assessment methods, curriculum design, student experience, and professional support (Badley, 2002; Gosling & D'Andrea, 2001; Smith & Bath, 2004). At the same time, a greater emphasis has been placed on educational research (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006; Brew, 2002).

However, the effort to transform teachers into academics has proven problematic (Macfarlane & Hughes, 2009). On one hand, educational developers are often not affiliated with Schools of Education but instead operate within stand-alone support units aligned with managerial structures (Blackmore & Wilson, 2005; Brew, 2002). On the other hand, due to contractual differences, research has not traditionally been part of the teacher's identity (Hoyle, 2001).

To address this tension, UK universities implemented a strategic plan in 2004 aimed at integrating research into professional practice by situating it within Graduate Schools or Educational Academies (Macfarlane & Hughes, 2009). The main objective was to facilitate the identity shift from 'teacher' to 'teacher-researcher' by raising the status of research through initiatives such as accreditation via the Higher Education Academy Fellowship. The aim was to strengthen scholarly connections between researchers and teaching fellows by increasing funding for pedagogic research (Macfarlane & Hughes, 2009).

However, the divide between teaching, leadership and research continues to exist, challenging the academic identity of lecturers torn between different organisational structures of research and teaching (Reid & Petocz, 2003). At the same time, this move has facilitated the forging of new academic identities by developing teaching through research and research through enquiry-based teaching (Hillier & Jameson, 2003; Jenkins & Healey, 2005; Lucas, 2006).

The studies of professional identity construction against organisational discourse foreground this thesis. The research into authentic teachers' identity (Calvert et al., 2011; Kreber, 2011), based on moral integrity, care and support for students, ethical research and high-quality teaching (Fitzmaurice, 2013), is particularly relevant to teaching identity formation. Other studies of developing group identity (Beck & Young, 2005), supported by professional practice (Jawitz, 2009; Trede et al., 2012), have contributed to professional identity in education research.

The existing scholarship also highlights conflicting demands placed on academics, who struggle to make choices between their professional duties or “oughtness” (Calvert et al., 2011, p.31), such as service to students, collegiality, teaching and scholarship, and the increasing managerial pressure of performativity leading to an identity crisis. The tension between the new managerialism (consumer-oriented, performativity-based structure) and traditional academia has been reflected in the dilemmatic professional identity claims. These claims position newly forged hybrid identities as being collective versus individual, academic versus administrative, inclusive versus exclusive, and stable versus changeable (Bamberg, 2008; Bolden et al., 2011).

The impact of the new managerial culture has revealed identity management, erosion and loss of career capital among university leadership (Floyd & Dimmock, 2011). However, recent scholarship identifies some positive trends in the changing culture of Education Departments, indicating the gradual development of academic capital with equal value of teaching and research (Deem & Lucas, 2007).

The reviewed literature has identified a gap in research into gendered professional identity in interaction with the new managerial culture in the UK academic setting.

2.7.2. Professional identity construction and organisational change

Research into organisational culture shows that for its values to be sustained, they need to be confirmed by both leadership and staff. True changes are only possible if they are managed well through a full understanding of the implications and anxieties that they may cause to individuals (Schein, 2010). Thus, a holistic approach to understanding the needs of individuals within the organisation is needed.

There are claims refuting the relationship between the changing internal (organisational), external (policy), and personal circumstances and professional effectiveness (Calvert et al., 2011). However, there is a scholarship which reveals tensions between professional values and institutional identity caused by organisational change (Winter, 2009; Sutton, 2015).

The challenges that individuals face when confronted by institutional changes can be better understood if their professional identity is viewed through a poststructuralist lens. Within this framework, personal and professional are closely intertwined (Fitzmaurice, 2013). Narrative professional identities continuously resist or submit to conflicting discourses of family, job security, academic mobility, choice and opportunity (Clegg, 2008; Smith, 2010)

while making contradictory claims of agency and disempowerment (Hanson, 2009; Le Gallais, 2009).

The tensions within professional identity, brought about by external factors such as changes in institutional culture, technological innovation and role expectations (Briggs, 2007; Deem & Lucas, 2007; Smith, 2010; Sutton, 2015), result in role ambiguity (Schulz, 2013). This shift introduces new pedagogical challenges, widening the gap between the provisional self (Ibarra, 1999) and the institutional self (McNaughton & Billot, 2016). As a result, educators may experience disempowerment, identity conflict, and regulation (McNaughton et al., 2014), all of which can impact their personal and professional identity.

2.7.3. Middle managers' hybrid identity construction at a time of organisational change

The launch of the Academic Education Pathway (AEP) in UK universities in 2004 was intended to bridge the gap between teaching, research and management. It involved a major organisational change, resulting in contracts changing from teaching or managing only to additional elements of education, education-related scholarship, and leadership. As a result, new hybrid professional identities started to form, resisting or conforming to organisational change.

The area of middle managers' identity construction in the context of the AEP contractual change has not been sufficiently explored (Linaker, 2023b). While the scheme was meant to reward and promote teachers and administrators by adding research to their contract, many have reported identity control (Alvesson et al., 2008) against the discourse of new managerialism (Hill & Kumar, 2009). This has been particularly evident in the context of IWLPs, which are uniquely positioned as teaching-only departments, outside the traditional departmental structure. This organisational change has made the most profound impact on the middle managers, some of whom have experienced a backlash by being referred to as third space professionals (Whitchurch, 2008).

Middle managers have often performed hybrid roles in the university hierarchy (Whitchurch, 2008). Some of them lack managerial skills or experience, tend to follow rather than shape the university's strategy, and are perceived by colleagues as supporting managerialism—factors that contribute to further identity struggles and professional isolation (Preston & Price, 2012). Others are deemed to be reluctant managers (Scase & Goffee, 2017; Knights & Trowler, 2000), emerging in the space between the professional and academic domains

(Gordon & Whitchurch, 2010). They operate beyond institutional and across intersectoral boundaries, shifting towards more unstable and diverse interdisciplinary identities (Henkel, 2005).

Despite recent studies of middle management in education (Acker, 2014; Floyd, 2016; Floyd & Fung, 2017; Netolicky, 2022), the IWLP context remains unexplored. The hybrid identity formation of IWLPs' middle managers acting as educational leaders, teachers, and scholars (Whitchurch, 2012) at a time of organisational change has not been investigated. Thus, the research into this area of middle management is timely and has policy-making implications.

The transfer to the AEP contract and the need to combine research, teaching and managerial responsibilities have created a particular tension between their perceived, imagined, and prescribed identities (McNaughton & Billot, 2016; Winter, 2009). They often balance between the roles of academic managers and managed academics, supporting or resisting the departmental cultural values in a result-driven environment (Floyd, 2016; Winter, 2009).

Despite some scholarship reporting the benefits of the newly formed professional identities (Di Napoli, 2009), triggered by the change of contract from administrative to managerial, there are also reports of insufficient care and resilience provided by the organisation because of organisational change (Smith, 2010). While some middle managers' identities become more dynamic and fluid (Delanty, 2007), creating new knowledge outside the remits of their roles (Whitchurch, 2008), others experience professional identity struggle (Preston & Price, 2012) due to perceived role ambiguity (Schulz, 2013). Other studies critique the AEP transitional policy for its' inconsistency, lack of clarity and lack of success in all three elements of the education triangle, claiming that progression is only possible through career manipulation, thus undermining the integrity of this organisational change (Khusainova, 2023).

The impact of the organisational change, such as an AEP transfer within the context of the IWLP, has not been previously investigated; however, the reports from the recent CercleS Conference identified some problematic areas (Critchley et al., 2025). Whilst the transfer to AEP leads to better promotional opportunities, it is also met with resistance from the teaching and management staff without previous research experience, who are expected to make scholarship contributions. Other factors contributing to this anxiety are a lack of visibility of the scheme, the laborious application process, increased workload and no guarantee of a successful outcome (Linaker, 2023b). Thus, the promotional incentive needs

to be balanced with appropriate support, mentorship and the development of communities of practice for collaborative scholarship initiatives and leadership development (Wyburd, 2024).

Research into organisational change recognises the importance of the role of middle managers as agents of change within the organisation, acting as a medium between the staff and the senior management (Schein, 2010). Therefore, the study of how the contractual change affects the middle manager's identity is important for the success of the AEP policy.

The literature reviewed in this section has pointed to gaps in the knowledge of professional identity construction at a time of organisational change, specifically middle managers' identity work when transitioning to Academic Pathway contracts within the context of IWLP.

2.8. CONCLUSION

To conclude, this chapter reviewed theoretical and empirical literature underpinned by four conceptual categories - educational leadership, leadership experience, institutional change and dilemmatic identity. The literature review is framed by the key theory of feminist poststructuralism, which foregrounds all stages of the study and intersects with other theories - educational leadership, gendered leadership experience, discourse and identity construction, dilemmatic identity, critical race, social role and organisational culture and change. The chapter considered the relationship between these theories, supported by the existing literature, and outlined a theoretical foundation for the current study.

The review has identified problematic areas and gaps in research into leadership in higher education, mediated by gender, culture and ethnicity. This study aims to bridge these gaps and to shed light on the barriers to professional identity construction of female middle managers from minority backgrounds. It contributes to the existing scholarship and adds to the knowledge of female leadership experience through the interplay of ethnicity, culture and gender in the multicultural setting of UK IWLPs.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis explores problematic leadership experience and gendered identity construction of middle managers of Russian and Arabic ethnic origin in the context of the Institute-Wide Language Programmes (IWLP) of UK Universities. This study aims to address the gap in the knowledge of ethnically and culturally diverse leadership identity in the context of the IWLP. It examines the participants' narratives by applying small story positioning analysis as the main analytical tool (Bamberg, 2006, 2011; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) to understand the female leadership experience.

The study is relatable within the context of UK universities' IWLP and the context of institutional changes experienced by middle managers. It makes a scholarship contribution to methodology through the combination of thematic, narrative and positioning analysis to the dilemmatic nature of identity. This method helps uncover identity work of becoming different and remaining the same, belonging to the community and being unique, becoming agentive, yet constructed by external discourses (Bamberg, 2011). The narratives are segmented into small stories, which become sites of identity construction (Bamberg, 2006; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008).

This methodology has been applied to a range of leadership identity studies (Bager, 2019; Clifton, 2014; Clifton & Jones, 2018; Clifton et al, 2020; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Isik-Guler & Erdogan-Ozturk, 2022; Schnurr, 2022). However, its application is limited in the field of higher education (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Isik-Guler & Erdogan-Ozturk, 2022), particularly in the UK higher education context (Linaker, 2023a), presenting a knowledge gap. Despite not being widely used, it has proven to be effective in ensuring the depth of analysis while interrogating the ambiguities and inconsistencies of the narratives, thus increasing the trustworthiness of results.

The research questions for this study were formulated based on personal interest and professional experience and justified by the existing knowledge gap in the area of leadership in the specified context of IWLPs. They had been informed by the conceptual and theoretical framework and the findings from the literature review, as discussed in Chapter 2. They are underpinned by the feminist poststructuralist ontology, which is the researcher's positionality.

The thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. How is female leadership identity constructed in the culturally diverse context of the Institution-Wide Language Programmes of UK universities?
2. How is leadership experienced through interaction between professional discourses of institutional change and curriculum review and personal discourses of gender, culture, and ethnicity?
3. How do the participants' identities shift from dilemmatic to agentic when resisting or aligning with dominant societal discourses?

By answering these exploratory questions, it is hoped that the study will reveal the barriers to leadership development and the transformative aspect of the narrative in identity construction, making a unique contribution to knowledge.

The methodology chapter describes how these research questions are situated within the research paradigm and methodology framework. The chosen research design is aligned with the aim of this study and supported by the literature (Creswell, 2013; Kumar, 2002). The sections below set out the paradigm rationale, chosen methodology and methods for data collection and analysis. The chapter will also justify the appropriateness of the methodology and methods selected in addressing the research questions. Finally, it will outline how the question of trustworthiness was addressed.

To understand the rationale for considering this framework for educational research, the chapter considers the epistemological and ontological positioning of the researcher and outlines ethical considerations. I will refer to “researcher” as a generic term and use the first-person singular in reference to specific elements of my research in line with my positionality.

3.2. PARADIGM DESIGN AND RATIONALE

Figure 3.1. provides a visual representation of the paradigm design, consisting of ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology.

Figure 3.1. Paradigm design

Paradigm design			
Constructivist ontology	Interpretivist epistemology	Feminist post structuralist axiology	Qualitative methodology

This study is positioned within the interpretative/qualitative paradigm, which serves the purpose of analysing and describing the data drawn from the participants’ narratives, acknowledging the value-laden viewpoints of both the researcher and the participants. Due to the researcher being closely embedded in the researched community, the neutral and impartial perspective of the objectivist paradigm is not what this study aims to achieve.

Instead, by adopting a poststructuralist methodology, I acknowledge that my bias can impact data. To reduce the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched, I aim to fully understand the significance of the data, rather than confirm my assumptions. My worldview, shaped by my epistemological and ontological assumptions, is outlined in the Researcher’s Positionality section.

3.2.1. Ontological approach

This research has been informed by the constructivist ontology, which means that the world is socially constructed by the human mind and reality is experienced subjectively, i.e. differently by different individuals, depending on their worldviews (Cohen et al., 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 2013). This paradigm is underpinned by social constructivism, characterised by the critical stance to reality, which is socially and historically contextualised. Within this paradigm, knowledge is created through the researcher’s personal experience and interpreted through interactions with the participants, while reality is constructed by language, ensuing social action and empowerment (Burr, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Constructivism stems from the intellectual movements of postmodernism, which rejects the idea of ultimate truth and draws attention to the multiplicity of reality (Lather, 1990). This inquiry is particularly concerned with a social identity theory, which views identity as constructed through social interactions, where language becomes a tool and a subject of research (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). In this framework, both researcher and participants co-construct the knowledge developed through narrative in interaction and aimed at

transformative action (Etherington, 2004; Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). Thus, constructivist researchers are concerned with the process of interaction with the participants, the societal and cultural context and their positionality and intent, which colour the world interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2.2. Epistemological approach

This study is shaped by the interpretivist epistemology, which perceives knowledge as produced through the construction of meaning, being subjective and obtained from the participants through the researcher's agentic involvement (Cohen et al., 2018). This epistemological perspective explores the nature of knowledge, its validity and credibility and how it is received. The interpretivist approach views the relationship between people and the world as active and agentic, interpreting the world as a social construct (Burrell & Morgan, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018).

This research pursues data-generated knowledge within a specific situation at a particular time (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Although the credibility of interpretivist research can be problematic due to a high degree of subjectivity (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), constructivist researchers aim to acquire contextualised knowledge through an individualised approach (Jameson, 2012). Thus, as a feminist poststructuralist researcher, my epistemological belief is that reality can be changed through research. The narratives co-constructed by the researcher and the women participants in my study are shaped by our individual experiences and backgrounds and can bring transformative action.

3.2.3. Axiological approach

The axiology of the interpretative paradigm acknowledges the value-laden nature of research and is an integral part of the researcher's subjectivity in the process. The researcher's insider role and social positioning, such as gender, age, ethnicity, immigration status, personal experiences and beliefs, are essential to all stages of research (Berger & Luckmann, 2023). Within the feminist poststructuralist framework, a diversity of values is emphasised, including diverse identities and communities (Olesen, 2011).

The axiological approach of a feminist poststructuralist means that the researcher establishes a close and collaborative relationship with the researched to avoid being objectionable and exploitative (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Thus, as a feminist poststructuralist researcher, I make my positionality explicit but remain self-critical and self-reflexive, maintaining the power balance between myself and the participants. I openly

discuss the values that shaped my research and continuously reassess the way they impact all stages of my inquiry in the chapter on the researcher's positionality.

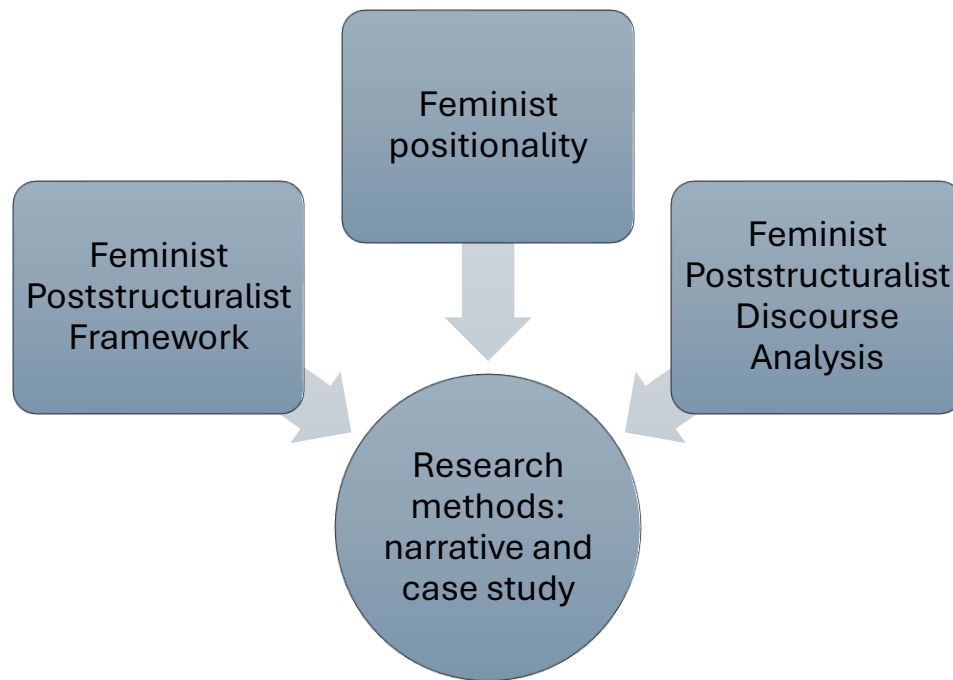
3.3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study relies on qualitative methodology, which investigates leadership phenomena by extracting qualitative data. Measures are taken to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data obtained from unstructured interviews, in which each participant constructs their identity through their individual narrative and standpoint (Guba and Lincoln, 2013). The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm is best suited for generating data emerging from an in-depth analysis and interpretation within a given context (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This method allows the researcher and the researched to have a mutual impact on each other (Coleman & Briggs, 2002).

By using this methodology, the interpretivist researcher can gain an insight into individual perception of reality and the experiences of the participants whilst acknowledging their own bias and subjectivity. As a feminist poststructuralist researcher, I acknowledge my subjective stance, which filters through all stages of research design (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The choice of this methodology is justified by the data authenticity and confirmability through the verisimilitude of discourses (IWLPs across UK universities). The researcher's membership in the researched community lends further credibility to the analysis (Riessman, 2015). The inductive nature of this methodology has allowed me to reassess and modify elements of research, such as research questions and data collection strategy, to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem.

Figure 3.2. Introduces the methodological approach of this thesis, underpinned by the feminist positionality of the researcher.

Figure 3.2. Methodological approach



3.3.1. Feminist poststructuralist framework

Within the interpretivist paradigm, the feminist poststructuralist approach foregrounds this study, allowing for a high degree of subjectivity with multiple interpretations of the world and an emancipatory potential for research (Jameson, 2012). The poststructuralist framework lends itself well to educational research due to its subjective nature and the researcher's self-reflexive positioning as an agent and part of the research process. As a poststructuralist researcher, I bring with me my personal characteristics, values, and beliefs to the selection of methodology, sampling, data analysis and interpretation (Hammersley, 2013). At the same time, I acknowledge the limitations of my agency, undermined by the social context and the balance of hegemonic powers within society (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

A poststructuralist paradigm views knowledge as constructed and embedded in a researcher's worldview and the lives of the researched (Cohen et al., 2018; Laine, 2000). Therefore, with this study, I aim to expose different meanings by different worldviews in a discontinuous, changing, and unstable context. My mission is to investigate the relationship between knowledge, meaning, power, and identity, while exercising a sensitive approach to deconstructing the dichotomies of leadership and gender, aiming to achieve policy-changing results (Guba & Lincoln, 2013).

3.3.2. Feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis

Based on my ontological beliefs, my thesis is grounded in the feminist poststructuralist theory (McQuillan, 2007; Tallis, 2016; Weedon, 1997, 2006, 2021). This theoretical framework is best served by the Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) as a methodological tool for gendered identity research. Baxter (2003) defines FPDA as a new theoretical and methodological approach, claiming that new analytical tools were needed to contest existing knowledge (Baxter, 2008). Despite early criticism of this approach as inconsistent (Cameron, 2001), the principles of feminist poststructuralism were effectively used to investigate the issues of gendered educational practice and female leadership in the UK and international context (Baxter, 2002, 2003, 2017; Baxter & Al A'ali, 2016; Kamada, 2009).

The FPDA applied to educational research puts the researcher's subjectivity into focus at all stages of the research process, from selecting the subject, framework, and method, to gathering and analysing data, making recommendations, and facilitating practical, transformative changes to educational practices (Baxter, 2002). A woman in the centre of this approach finds herself involved in conflicting discursive practices. The awareness of these practices empowers her to resist or change reality. Thus, FPDA is concerned with ambiguities of power relations in society exercised through intersectional and contextual discourses, while acknowledging the self-reflexive and non-universal nature of feminism as a movement (Baxter 2003). It aims to give voice to the minorities or those who are marginalised at a specific moment in time (Baxter 2003). Such a transformative project is at the core of my thesis, with its purpose of hearing from women middle managers of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds through a deconstruction of their self-reflexive narratives.

This approach is selected as it best suits my enquiry and creates a textual interplay between methods and content, allowing for open-ended conclusions and multiple interpretations, viewing gender as performative (Butler, 2006). The meaning is constructed within the UK-based communities of IWLPs, while the key elements of analysis are deemed to be interdiscursivity and self-reflexivity. As with my study, this method supports small-scale, localised transformative missions, giving space to silenced voices through heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1994; Baxter, 2008). By adopting a poststructuralist framework and a feminist stance to educational research, this thesis aims to contribute to the feminist poststructuralist discourse of leadership identity in higher education (Jones, 2020).

3.3.3. Researcher positionality

As a feminist poststructuralist scholar, I am concerned with the non-replication and eradication of injustice, privilege, and oppression. Thus, my ontological assumption is based on reality, which perpetuates power imbalance and marginalisation on the grounds of different aspects of identity.

The positionality of a feminist researcher has been critiqued for the value-laden and pre-determined ideological agenda which a researcher pursues to facilitate transformative change without making any significant changes (Cohen et al., 2018). However, I would agree with Baxter (2003) that value-free research in education perpetuates the existing status quo and fails to expose oppression and inequality. The researcher's ideological positioning, efforts to restore the balance of power and to expose oppression and hegemony are necessary research tools, aiming to bring socio-political change in the world of education (Cohen et al., 2018). By advancing social justice research on matters of equity, fairness, and freedom from oppression (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019), as a feminist researcher, I also aim to promote issues of globalisation, decolonisation, diversity, and inclusion of educational leadership.

Unlike the positivist positioning of the researcher as an outsider, the feminist researcher is closely involved in the lives of the researched (Laine, 2000). This relationship can be problematic, as the researcher is confronted by the dilemma of being either too close to the research and compromising the ethical framework or being too detached to fully uncover hidden meanings and issues (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002).

I argue that by explicitly disclosing my epistemological and ontological positioning and my feminist bias, I can achieve a higher degree of connectedness with the researched subject. At the same time, I aim to take care not to make myself vulnerable (emotionally and psychologically exposed) by remaining open and receptive through this disclosure (Norum, 2000; Venäläinen, 2023). My biography as a researcher and my gendered, cultural, and ethnic identity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) contribute to this study. My positionality implies an in-depth exploration of the subject, and for the data to emerge through the lens of my assumptions (Merriam, 2014), which have been informed by my personal and professional educational leadership journey.

Using the self-reflexive stance (Goldstein, 2017) as a researcher and a member of the researched community, I foster empathy and understanding towards the researched. Self-reflexivity allows for a deeper agentic involvement in co-constructing the participants'

stories through introspection. I am also conscious of the risk of reproducing, rather than unsettling, power dynamics by practising “comfortable”, rather than “uncomfortable”. i.e. disruptive reflexivity, which “challenges the limits of existing knowledge and acceptability of research practice” (Pillow, 2003, p.188).

Additionally, I am being self-reflexive about my role as a critical actor (Cohen et al., 2018) and critically reflect on my positionality at all stages of enquiry. While declaring my agenda, I also respect the participants’ viewpoints, as evidenced by the narratives. Thus, I take deliberate steps to ensure that the researcher's voice does not overpower that of the participants. I strive to maintain a balance of power by deconstructing meaning and creating a textual interplay that explores the double movement of positioning within the research process (Baxter 2003).

3.3.4. Ethics and insider research

The questions of ethics and insider research are closely related to my positionality. To comply with research ethical principles, I have made every effort to protect the participants’ psychological, physiological and emotional well-being through all stages of research (Thomas, 2021). The participants have been offered full confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The interview data has been stored according to the University guidance on Teams. Full ethical approval was obtained from the University of Reading Ethics Committee before commencing the interviews.

To ensure that the research is conducted ethically and with moral responsibility, I was guided by insider researcher’s recommendations for those who undertake interpretative research within their organisations (in this case, my professional network of IWLPs). In this context, the researcher applies a particularly sensitive approach to personal data, as the participants are often colleagues who belong to the same community of practice (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). Thus, I take care of internal confidentiality and the moral dilemmas which may appear during and after the research process, involving relationships with participants. This also includes conflicting roles of colleague/researcher and the delicate balance of power and insider knowledge between the participants and the organisation (Floyd & Arthur, 2012).

The standard anonymity procedures of disguising the identities of colleagues are not always sufficient for an insider researcher (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). To anonymise the data fully, I ensured that only the details essential for my research design were included in the analysis, such as gender and ethnicity, to prevent the participant from being recognised. Thus, I

removed all personal identifying details, including individual professional and institutional credentials. In some instances, I made slight changes to the titles of the individuals to create another layer of confidentiality (Mercer, 2007).

Most importantly, to ensure the participants' agentive involvement in the research process, the participants were offered to choose pseudonyms, which were used throughout the research process. To eliminate the potential recognition of participants by the academic community (Trowler, 2014), I requested additional approval from the participants for the inclusion of certain data, which I considered sensitive or problematic. For example, the inclusion of such personal data as marital and educational status, immigration history and family circumstances.

My membership in the same community of practice fostered by shared professional practice and networking (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999) has given me privileged access to data and enriched my knowledge about the research context (Trowler, 2014; Mercer, 2007). At the same time, this commonality enforced certain assumptions about the participants (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). Therefore, while enjoying this privilege, I had to be careful to disclose my assumptions and biases to mitigate their influence on data (Floyd & Arthur, 2012; Norum, 2000) and to exercise an ethic of care (Gibbs & Costley, 2006) for the participants.

This meant reflecting on the impact our interactions have had on the participants and what would have happened to them had this research not been conducted. Thus, I attempted to maintain a fine balance between my subjectivity and objective representation of the participants' positioning. It also meant that I needed to be sensitive about the ownership of data when collecting, analysing, discussing data, and asking questions about who owns a story and whose version is convincing (Cohen et al., 2018). This ethical consideration was resolved by inviting the participants to comment on the interview transcripts before commencing the analysis.

I also acknowledge that my level of insiderness or the way I was embedded in my organisation varied according to how closely I collaborated with the participants, their home institutions and their shared identity characteristics (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). Thus, to avoid interpreting data through my pre-existing knowledge in relation to some participants from my immediate working environment, I endeavoured to contextualise the data in the narrative (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). I was also aware of the extent to which I could identify with the researched community in the case of Arabic, due to my different racial, cultural, and

ethnic background (Gillies & Alldred, 2012). I mitigated this aspect through close engagement with the community and establishing affinity through professional practice, socialisation, and research.

My insiderness also shifted throughout the research process, by continuously and consciously moving inside and outside the participants' experience and by being both an empathetic collaborator and an outside observer (Hellawell, 2006; Mercer, 2007; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). To avoid the danger of power asymmetry, I exercised a self-reflexive and sensitive approach to my participants, aiming to reduce my agency and empower the participants by offering them choices of interview arrangements and details for inclusion in the research output (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Trowler, 2014). Using a narrative approach also helped in maintaining power parity, as the interviewees were offered to take a lead in the narrative process (Riessman, 2015). At the same time, as a feminist researcher, I did not aim to eliminate the power imbalance completely, but to be conscious of, and constantly reflect on its effect on research outcomes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

3.4. RESEARCH METHODS

My strategy was to achieve a high-quality, innovative research design, which combines the two approaches (narrative inquiry and case study). This strategy is best suited to a participatory, multi-voiced, emancipatory, and deconstructive purpose of research design within a feminist poststructuralist paradigm.

3.4.1. Narrative approach to dilemmatic identity

The narrative approach to identity research has been selected as the most appropriate methodology framed by the researcher's positionality. It views identity as positioning and being positioned by other agents (Bamberg, 2004; Bucholtz & Hall, 2022; Davies & Harré, 1990) and contextualised by culture and language (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). The narrative inquiry considers identity as dilemmatic: being stable yet changing, being unique yet the same as others, and being agentic yet constrained by societal discourses (Bamberg, 2006, 2011).

I used the narrative inquiry method (Barkhuizen, 2017; Benson, 2014; De Fina & Geogakopoulou, 2015) and narrative in interaction (Adler et al., 2017; De Fina, 2009; Webster & Mertova, 2007) to make narrative a site of identity construction (Van De Mierop et al., 2022). This method focusses on the details of individual lives to make meaning of the participants' experience (Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010).

The narrative inquiry has become influential as a method of analysis as a result of the narrative turn in identity research, using both elicited and non-elicited narratives to analyse talk in interaction (Bamberg, 2006; Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004; De Fina et al., 2006; Ochs & Capps, 2009). The narrative turn has become particularly significant in leadership research in recent years, with narratives viewed discursively as performative concepts, which shape the speakers' identities through storytelling (Bager, 2019; Clifton, 2014; Clifton & Jones, 2018; Clifton et al., 2020; Georgakopoulou, 2007; Schnurr, 2022). These studies analyse how the participants use the narratives to reflect upon themselves and to construct identities in the given time and space through language use (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; De Fina et al., 2006). The studies of educational identity using the narrative inquiry method have also come into prominence in recent years (Barkhuizen, 2017; Gallardo, 2019; Kayi-Aydar, 2019), with particular focus on cross-cultural, autobiographic narratives (Ma, 2024) and gender (Fuller, 2018).

However, despite the volume of recent research on the narrative approach to leadership or teaching identity, there is insufficient application of this method to educational leadership as a separate subject, particularly in the context of UK higher education. This is despite the emerging interest in narrative methodology for educational leadership studies outside the UK (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Isik-Guler & Erdogan-Ozturk, 2022).

There is also limited investigation of dilemmatic positioning of leadership or migrant identity (Clifton & Jones, 2018; Clifton & Meeroop, 2017). These studies provide initial evidence that the narrative approach allows for in-depth data to be generated (McCaslin & Scott, 2015). Thus, this thesis fills the gap in the application of the narrative method to dilemmatic identity by uncovering nuanced identity work in relation to leadership, gender, culture, and ethnic discourses of middle managers in specific educational contexts of IWLPs in the UK.

3.4.1.1. Small stories

Within the narrative inquiry method, we distinguish small stories as literal and metaphorical entities, focussing on fleeting aspects of lived experience (Bamberg, 2004, 2006), making them both the tool and the context of analysis (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Small stories constructed in interaction give insights into significant and tellable narrative moments, which can be missed in big narratives. The stories use narrative dimensions, such as tellership (who has the right to tell) and tellability (the reason for telling the story) (Ochs &

Apps, 2009). They also contain elements of narrative orientation, such as starting the story and not finishing or signalling but not telling (Hymes, 1996).

While big stories deal with the representation of the world, small stories told in interaction construct individual identities (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) and acts of gendered identity performance (Butler, 2006) at a given time and space. If we assume that identity is not static, but always changing and shifting, then interactive acts of storytelling serve as identity construction sites (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Thus, small story analysis is used for highlighting dilemmatic identity (Bamberg, 2011) through interaction between the storyteller and the researcher (Georgakopoulou, 2007). These stories are both a source of data and an object of analysis (Archakis & Tsakona, 2012; De Fina, 2009), allowing for better scrutiny of inconsistencies and ambiguities and used as a strategy to extract the most trustworthy data (Clifton et al., 2020; De Fina, 2008; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015).

The reason I chose this method is that it best serves the most detailed and nuanced investigation of the meaning through explicit and implicit identity claims (Bamberg et al., 2007; Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010; Floyd, 2012). The application of the narrative inquiry methodology with the focus on small story analysis within a specific educational context makes a timely contribution to research in education.

3.4.2. Multiple case study design

The multiple-case study approach was used to gather data about identity construction by investigating the multiple cases of IWLP leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McCaslin & Scott, 2015; Thomas, 2021). This approach explores the problem within the natural context of its occurrence through researching all the multiple sources of information about it. Thus, the case study approach allows for in-depth analysis of the subject through exploration of the real-life situation, participants' experience and attitudes (Gillham, 2000; Hancock & Algozzine, 2021; Yin, 2018).

This approach fits the purpose of my thesis, as it aims to understand the unique, under-researched phenomenon within clearly defined boundaries (Yin, 2018). Thus, it explores the unknown phenomenon of leadership experience within the context of the IWLP. Thus, each case provides an in-depth investigation of an individual IWLP leadership experience, including the background information of the participants and the relevant IWLP context known to the researcher.

The Doctorate in Education programme requires the research to be set within the researcher's professional community and to contribute to the professional knowledge and practice. Thus, the case study approach satisfied these requirements. Most importantly, this approach allowed me to enhance educational theory by discovering new knowledge, which can potentially lead to policy change (Bassey, 1999; Coleman & Briggs, 2002; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

My positionality has also been a deciding factor in the choice of this design as it considers localised, specific contexts, bounded by time and place, in line with the feminist poststructuralist agenda. By being embedded in the same community and professional practices within the specific institutional context, I was able to get further insight into the complexity of the problem.

3.5. SAMPLING

To gain a deeper understanding of the problems faced by the education leaders in my study, purposive, non-probability sampling of individual participants with specific characteristics and experience has been chosen for this research (Patton, 2015, 2022; Suri, 2011; Suri & Clarke, 2009).

From the 16 strategies for purposive (also referred to as purposeful) sampling (Patton, 2015), I chose the strategy of criterion sampling, which means that I selected only cases which met the set of criteria for my research. The principles of accessibility, availability and data richness also guided me. These principles align with the research purpose of in-depth exploration of the subject, focusing on a group of participants with specific characteristics who can provide information-rich data. Due to the specificity of this case study and the limited availability of middle managers of Arabic and Russian origin in the UWLP, this proved to be the most logical sampling strategy. The advantage of the purposive sampling technique is in early data saturation due to the selection of participants who can provide thick data to help answer the research questions (Patton, 2002). Although I acknowledge that purposive selection may not be the most representative (Yin, 2015), the aim was to collect diverse data from accessible information-rich sources.

Although there is no specific number needed for conducting case study research (Patton, 2002), I was guided by the availability of participants and the principle of maximising information in sample size selection to conduct cross-case thematic analysis within the group of participants with similar characteristics (Yin, 2018). At a broader level, I chose the multiple

case study approach over a single case to increase confidence in the data. At a narrower level, due to the complexity of the topic, the multiple cases helped generate the most telling data and examine the topic with higher intensity (Yin, 2015). Additionally, the sample size was informed by similar qualitative studies with purposive sampling (Clifton & Jones, 2017; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Schnurr, 2022) to provide rich information (Patton, 1990) by revealing leadership experience through interactive storytelling.

The participants were chosen through the intersection of similar personal and professional characteristics from several institutions where Arabic and Russian are taught on IWLPs. The main characteristic the participants had in common is the shared professional context and leadership experience encumbered by gender stereotyping. At the same time, while the participants belonged to the same communities of practice integrated in foreign language teaching and connected through the intersection of culture, gender and leadership, they experienced leadership differently. I also had open access to participants through my affiliation with both Arabic and Russian communities.

The sample comprises ten participants - 5 educational leaders of Arabic and 5 of Russian ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The following specific criteria guided my sampling: females of Arabic and Russian origin, who had had at least ten-year-long careers in the UK higher education, who were middle managers in Language Centres or Institution-Wide Language Programmes, and who were also carers of children, grandchildren and/or elderly relatives. The participants were invited to take part in the research by either direct contact or through personal introduction.

3.5.1. Personal background information of the participants

In the section below, I present the most essential professional and personal background information about each participant, known to me before data collection. It consists only of the data relevant to my research questions to ensure full anonymity for the participants. This information is presented in the form of condensed narratives.

1. Mona

Mona's business career started in the Middle East, followed by a career gap due to marriage and immigration. The change in personal circumstances prompted her to turn to teaching and build a successful career managing a team of teachers in a UK university. She is a subject leader in Arabic and has caring responsibilities for her grandchildren.

2. Nina

Nina comes from an academic background. Born and educated in Russia, she completed her PhD abroad. She is married with small children and is a Russian subject leader at a UK university. Her scholarship interest is in literary translation.

3. Aadab

Aadab was educated in the Middle East first and completed her postgraduate studies in the UK. She is a team leader in a UK university. Her research interests are in translation studies. She has a grown-up child and cares for her elderly mother.

4. Mila

Mila's leadership experience was gained first in business in a Russian speaking country. She started her teaching career when she moved to the UK. She is now a Russian language coordinator at a UK university. She is interested in creative writing and drama. She has a grown-up child.

5. Faizah

Faizah has a long experience in educational leadership, first in the Middle East, where she taught and coordinated Arabic at higher education Institutions, then in UK universities. She has different leadership roles, both administrative and managerial and is an expert in teacher training. She has grown-up children.

6. Margarita

Having completed her undergraduate studies in a Russian town outside Moscow, she secured a scholarship to continue studying at a postgraduate level abroad. On completion, she was offered permanent employment as a Russian teacher at a UK university. She gradually progressed to becoming a subject leader in Russian. She specialises in dialectology. She is married with a small child.

7. Jaleela

Like Faizah, Jaleela has worked in educational leadership in both the Middle East and the UK universities. She was educated in the Middle East to the MA level and completed her doctoral studies at a UK university. She is a published scholar, teacher trainer and Arabic coordinator. She has a grown-up child.

8. Nuria

Nuria was born and educated to the doctoral level in a Russian-speaking country. She also has an MA from a UK university. She has taught Russian courses for many years and is now also a Russian coordinator. She has a grown-up child.

9. Svetlana

Svetlana was born and educated in Russia. She has worked as a Russian lecturer on IWLP and in the Slavic department at a UK university for many years. She has a grown-up child.

10. Basma

Basma comes from the Middle East and has a degree in architecture and in Arabic language teaching. She has worked as an Arabic coordinator at the IWLP for a long time and has grown-up children.

3.6. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND PROCEDURE

Narrative interviews with a focus on small story elicitation were used for data collection. Each participant was interviewed once over the period of three months, and each interview lasted between one and two hours. To create a comfortable and unobtrusive environment, the interviews were unscripted and unstructured, starting with a narrative-inducing open-ended prompt: “Tell me about your career journey” to ensure reflection and detail (Kvale, 2012). I chose the unstructured interview design due to its ability to foster a high level of rapport with the participants and empower them to lead the conversation, generating nuanced and rich data and unanticipated findings.

I used a combination of minimalist-passive interview techniques to allow the participants to lead the narrative flow, and conversational prompting to elicit the most salient and important stories, celebratory and challenging personal and professional experiences (Elliott, 2005; Reissman, 2015). Following uninterrupted storytelling, I then asked certain clarifying non-narrative thematic questions to elicit further data (Gabriel, 2000) and to facilitate reflexive insights (Reimann, 2003), digging deeper and helping to remember the participants’ most telling events and experiences. Due to the sensitive and personal themes explored, I engaged in active empathetic listening, whilst ensuring that the participants felt at ease at all stages of the interview.

Although all participants in my sample were coordinate bilinguals, fully proficient in two or more languages (Wei, 2020), I offered the Russian-speaking participants the opportunity to use their native language during the interview to enhance the participants' agentic engagement with the interview process and to facilitate freedom of expression. Due to my lack of linguistic competency in Arabic, I did not make this option available for the Arabic-speaking participants. However, some Arabic was used to establish cultural and linguistic rapport with the participants and create an intimate, confidence-inducing atmosphere. I acknowledge the linguistic limitations of my study. However, I aimed to mitigate this by my insider researcher knowledge and experience through a long-term close collaboration with both Russian and Arabic-speaking participants.

The storytelling approach was used as a tool for data collection in the most unthreatening way, to lower the unconscious defence barriers of the participants (Sacks & Jefferson, 2004). To avoid intrusive probing, I strived to be non-judgmental and collaborative (Wengraf, 2004). At the same time, I brought my own agency to the interview by sharing my memories and life stories when I wanted to explore the meanings and ambiguities of the narratives further (Wengraf, 2004). I followed the interviewee's lead as knowledge co-creator, reflecting, evaluating and remembering the events (Wagner & Wodak, 2006). Due to the interviews being conducted and recorded online, physical space was not considered. However, to ensure maximum consideration for the participants' time, they were offered to pick the most convenient time for a relaxed and unhurried conversation in line with the feminist epistemology (Kvale, 2012).

As an interpretivist constructionist researcher, I recognise the importance of building trust and confidence with the participants to ensure the depth and breadth of data. Therefore, building rapport with the interviewees is important not only for the good quality data collection, but also for the whole research design in line with the feminist poststructuralist principles of a non-exploitative, supportive and respectful attitude to the participants (Baxter, 2013). To ensure the relevant level of rapport, I had an initial email exchange and conversations on Teams with the participants, clarifying the details of the purpose, the method, and the potential outcomes of my research.

3.6.1. Data transcription

I have provided the verbatim transcriptions and the translations of the interviews. The transcriptions generated by Microsoft Teams were carefully proofread in line with the audio

and video recording, which I watched and listened to repeatedly (Bailey, 2008). To ensure full familiarisation and connection with the data, my transcription followed an interpretive approach, achieved through active and repeated listening and reading (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thus, the transcribed narratives were read several times for data immersion and for establishing iterative links between the empirical data and theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The transcription convention followed Jefferson's (2015) terminology and contained the elements of conversational and discourse analysis (Paltridge, 2021). Due to the interactive nature of data collection, some elements of conversational analysis convention for transcribing, such as repetitions, self-retrievals, pauses, silences, overlaps and sequencing were deemed appropriate (Gardner, 2004; Liddicoat, 2021; Sacks & Jefferson, 2004; Schegloff, 1999). Non-linguistic elements, such as gestures, mimics, and laughter, were not included in the transcription as they were not essential for my analysis.

While having ownership of the transcription (Cohen et al., 2011) and considering it a subjective act of interpretation, rather than an accurate reflection of reality (Gillham, 2000; Kvale, 2012), I wanted to create a multi-voiced approach to data collection (Baxter, 2013). Thus, the transcripts of the interviews were sent back to the participants for validation and comments, to ensure that they were accurate and reflected what the participants had said during the interview.

3.6.2. Pilot activity

To ensure that the data collection method and procedure are aligned with the research aims, I trialled the functionality of the method first. This activity was done as part of the research process to adjust data gathering procedures, which led to better quality analysis (Gillham, 2000).

Following the granting of ethical approval, I approached one of the participants, provided them with the information sheet and a participant's consent form and conducted a narrative interview. I then transcribed and analysed the received data, using thematic, narrative and three-level positioning analysis. Following this, I reflected on my approach and the prompts I used for eliciting the most telling short stories and revealing identity claims. The trialling process was successful and increased my confidence in the chosen method. At the same time, it helped me to fine-tune the narrative interview procedure.

3.7. ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The analysis was based on the data obtained through the prism of my subjective knowledge as an insider researcher and my subjective interpretation of the themes revealed. While acknowledging this subjectivity and my bias as a poststructuralist feminist researcher, I continued to be reflexive and interpretive at all stages of data collection and analysis to reduce my influence on the research process.

Following the principle of self-reflection, I analysed and reflected on the themes and sub-themes that cut across all interviews, highlighting the most meaningful quotations and associations (Floyd, 2012; Gillham, 2000). The narrative approach to analysis was chosen for its patchwork or bricolage design, which is non-linear and variable (Riessman, 2015; Silverman, 2002) to support my stance as a poststructuralist researcher.

The analysis followed a recursive cycle, which included thematic coding and categorisation, followed by narrative and positioning analysis at the level of detailed fine-grained discursive interrogation of each level of positioning. This was carried out in four stages: first, thematic; second, positioning level one, which included narrative analysis; third, positioning level two; and fourth, positioning level three. In the next three sub-sections of the analysis procedure, I will explain each stage in detail. I chose to use the combined approach to data analysis to strengthen the credibility of the study (Patton, 2002). Figure 3.3. illustrates this strategy.

Figure 3.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis	Positioning analysis	Narrative analysis
• Adopted from Braun & Clark model (2022)	• Three level positioning analysis of small stories adopted from Bamberg & Georgakopoulou model (2008)	• Adopted from Labov & Waletzky model (1997)

3.7.1. Thematic analysis

Repeated readings of the transcripts ensued initial thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to highlight landmark life experiences and identify the themes and subthemes of the

narrative, by looking for similarities, differences and patterns in the participants' accounts. I used a holistic approach to decipher hidden meanings and analyse women's experiences and perceptions, ensuring the iterative and inductive method of data interpretation, modified for the purposes of this research (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Kvale, 2012; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

The six-phase approach to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) has been adapted to a four-phase module. This suited the research better as the first introductory step to the three-level positioning analysis. The first phase included engaging with repeated immersive reading of data, noting key quotations, observing the patterns, and generating codes, while the second phase identified themes and sub-themes, which were further clustered into themes and verified across all ten narratives. I then identified and named the themes, reflected on areas where they overlap and further categorised them to align with my research questions.

3.7.2. Positioning analysis

Positioning analysis was used as the main analytical tool (Davies & Harre, 1990). Positioning framework makes the researcher an integral part of the analysis through introspection. To ensure the depth of the analysis, I was guided by the concept of the confessional to reveal power relations in society (Foucault, 2018). This analysis uncovers the ways people search for meaning and make themselves visible to others through verbalisation (Fejes, 2011). By applying the positioning model and reflexive thematic analysis, the meaning is discovered through analysing the tension between how the narrator wants to be understood by the outside world and how they are understood by their interlocutor, in this case, by me.

Within the bigger narratives, I identified small stories, highlighting the most memorable moments, producing discursive selves (Davies & Harre, 1990). The small stories extracted from the narrative identified the major global discourses, which brought identity dilemmas to the fore. This included belonging and being different, changing and remaining constant, resisting and conforming to societal discourses through explicit and implicit claims (Bamberg, 2011). The most prominent themes of gender, ethnicity, leadership learning and leadership experience, emerging from the data, were observed as a pattern and categorised to display identity performance (Bamberg, 2011).

The social constructionist perspective was central to this analysis - these themes were not waiting to be discovered as reflections of reality but were constructed and performed by the language through social interaction (Gill, 2000). Thus, the narrative was an ideal site for the

storytellers to construct their identities at the given moment, creating a relational experience (Butler, 2006; Van de Mierop et al., 2022).

The analysis was carried out at three levels (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). At the first level (positioning in relation to the characters within the story), I explored how the characters were positioned within the story world and how events were reconstructed by the narrator. At this stage, I also drew on the narrative elements of Labov and Waletzky's (1997) model, which include abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation and coda (to be discussed in the next section).

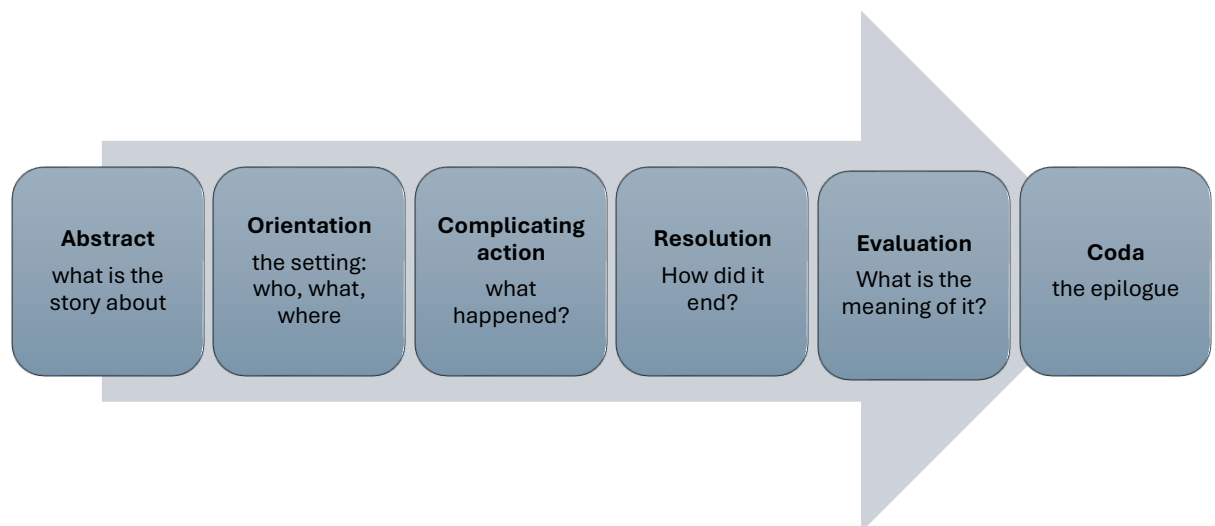
At the second level (in relation to the interlocutor/researcher), I explored how the interaction between the participant and me contributed to the participants' identity co-construction. This was the way to reveal identity work within the interview world by interrogating hidden meanings and uncovering ambiguous and unspoken experiences not made clear at the first level.

At the third level (in relation to the dominant discourses or master narratives), I analysed how the participants made sense of themselves in relation to the global societal discourses. By analysing how the narrators constructed their identities in relation to the story world and to the interviewer, I observed their identity work through interplay with the wider world. Thus, the first two levels of positioning through interaction helped reveal the third level of ideological positioning of the narrator as either complicit or countering the dominant discourses (Bamberg, 2006). Finally, I made the discourses embedded in the stories visible through the speakers' positioning and could answer my research questions.

3.7.3. Narrative analysis model

The elements of the Labov and Waletzky (1997) analytical model, consisting of abstract, orientation (time, place, participants, setting), evaluation embedded in the complicating action, resolution, and coda (relevance), were used as part of the analysis. This was done to outline the narrative structure and highlight the linguistic strategies used for identity negotiation. This model is presented in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4. Narrative analysis model



3.8. TRUSTWORTHINESS

I aimed to conduct this study with a high level of methodological rigour to ensure the trustworthiness of the research process and findings through the elements of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1989). The credibility was achieved through being explicit about my positionality as a feminist poststructuralist researcher and being conscious in my attempt to minimise the bias through reflexivity (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The use of theoretical and methodological triangulation also enhanced the trustworthiness. The application of multiple theoretical lenses helped in my understanding and interpretation of the findings. It also guided my selection of a research design, which combined a narrative inquiry and a multiple case study approach. Additionally, the triangulation of analytical strategies – thematic, positioning and narrative analysis - further increased the research credibility through iterative data interrogation. I aimed to be rigorous, transparent and systematic in the process of analysis, which included coding, categorising, positioning and narrative parts.

The engagement of the participants in the verification of the transcripts has also increased the trustworthiness of the findings at the stage of reporting. My long-term immersion in the research context through my professional practice and relationship with the participants through the community of practice has improved my understanding of the cases and further strengthened the credibility. I followed the recommendations for the regular, natural and

persistent observations and re-evaluation of the data through self-reflexive analysis, recorded in the research journal (Stahl & King, 2020).

As a qualitative researcher, my aim was not to make the study replicable, but to allow for the transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2013) of its design and findings through the verisimilitude of context within the IWLP and across language departments in the UK. However, there is a possibility of transfer to the wider educational sector, for example, to secondary schools' leadership research within the limits of case study design. The dependability of this study has been enhanced by two factors: my supervisors' scrutiny of all research stages and the peer review of some parts of the study, which were published in peer-reviewed journals (Linaker, 2023a, 2023b, 2024).

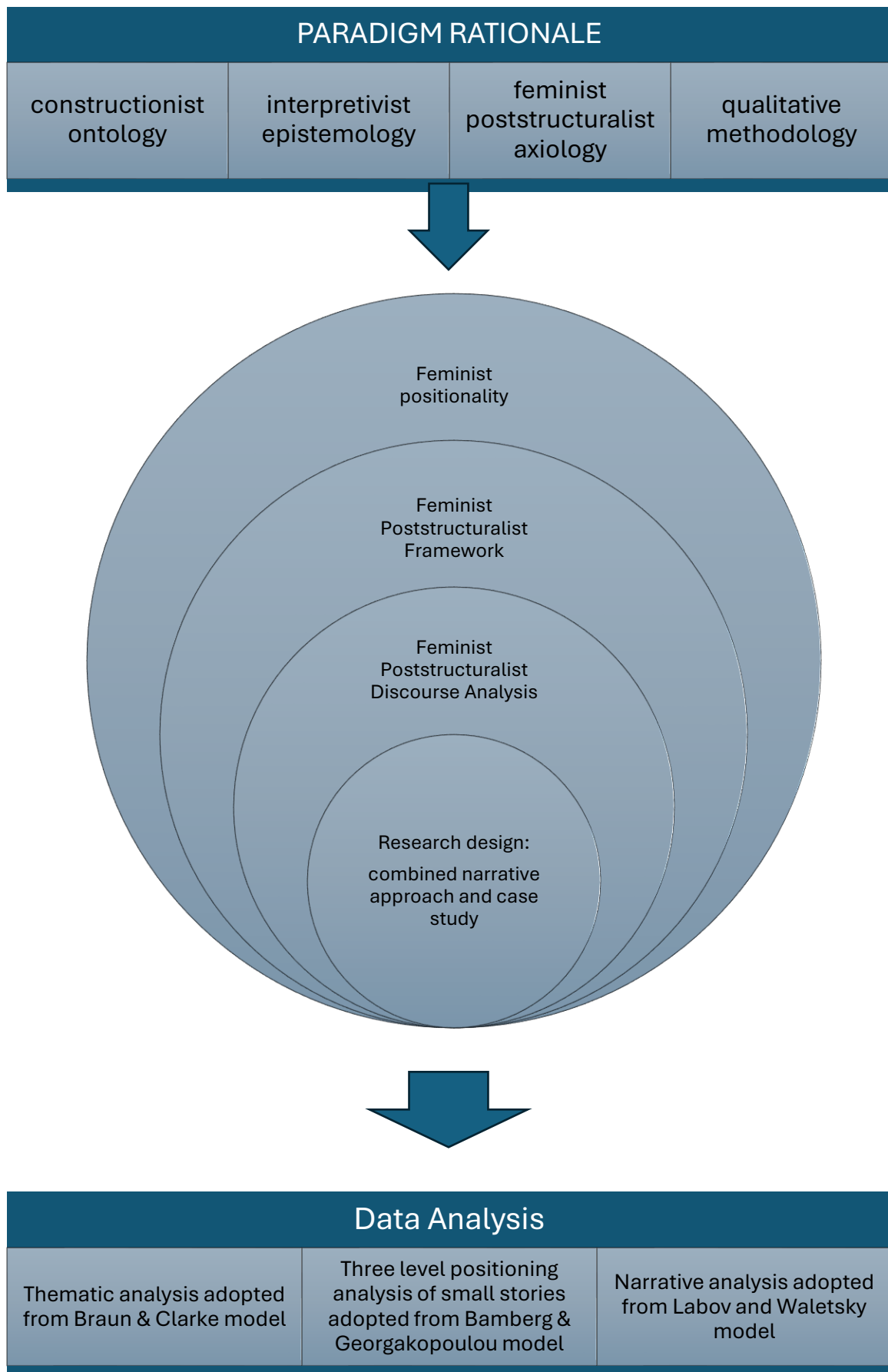
To strengthen the trustworthiness of my study, I have also exercised "reflexive auditing" (Stahl & King, 2020, p.28) by being explicit in my involvement in the research process and reflecting on how it changed my professional practice. By applying the criteria of credibility, dependability, and transferability, I was able to make the rationale behind the theoretical and methodological choices in the study transparent, thereby confirming its trustworthiness.

3.9. CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the methodology, in which all elements are organically interconnected and linked with the conceptual and theoretical framework, foregrounded in the researcher's positionality. The methodology includes the qualitative paradigm rationale, consisting of constructionist ontology, interpretivist epistemology and feminist poststructuralist axiology. The multiple case study research design, combined with narrative inquiry and small story approach, is framed by the feminist poststructuralist methodology. The detailed data analysis uses triangulation of thematic, positioning and narrative models to ensure the deep and holistic engagement with the data. The chapter also included the ethical considerations, insider research implications and the rationale for trustworthiness.

The methodology is summarised in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5. The summary of the methodological approach and research design



CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction and the structure of analysis

Following the introduction of main themes, the analysis was divided into 10 further sections – one for each participant’s narrative or case study. Each section was analysed at three levels of positioning: level one - in relation to the story actors, level two- in the here-and-now of the interview and level three - in relation to the wider societal Discourses. The following research questions are addressed in each section and summarised in the discussion.

1. How is female leadership identity constructed in the context of the Institution-Wide Language Programmes of UK universities?
2. How is leadership experienced through interaction between professional discourses of institutional change and curriculum review and personal discourses of gender, culture, and ethnicity?
3. How do the participants’ identities shift from dilemmatic to agentic when resisting or aligning with dominant societal discourses?

4.2. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The analysis of emerging data has revealed the recurrent themes, categorised from sub-themes that the narratives have in common. The most frequently occurring themes, which can be traced across all the narratives, belong to the intersection between personal and professional domains and are embedded in the data, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. I

acknowledge that the existing literature and my positionality as a feminist poststructuralist researcher have imposed a level of subjectivity on the findings.

Figure 4.1. The most frequently occurring themes across the narratives

	Identity regulation	
	Identity loss	
	Identity control	
	hybrid identity	
	in-group/out-group identity	
	emerging leadership	
	accidental leadership	
	reluctant leadership	
	authentic leadership	
	post-heroic versus heroic leadership	
	middle manager role ambiguity	
	identity manipulation	
	career limitaion	
	prestige and status	
	unmanageable workload	
	gender roles and gender ideology	
	institutional hierarchy	
	community of practice	
	institutional versus personal values	
	mentoring and professional development	
	anxiety about the future	
	life/work balance	
	imposter syndrome	

The themes were further categorised into concepts often referred to as societal Discourses in positioning analysis. They come into specific focus as the speakers take an agentive or non-agentive stance against them. These concepts are presented in each section at level three positioning analysis and further summarised diagrammatically in the Discussion chapter. However, while acknowledging the commonalities of the overarching themes, the analysis focusses on the differences in the ways these themes are reflected in each narrative, each unique experience.

4. 3. POSITIONING ANALYSIS

The analysis is presented in the historical present to maintain the immediacy of the interview and enhance the identity construction force of the narrative.

All participants begin constructing their identities by signposting their career paths and inserting small stories as most telling memories, outlining the most significant stages in their professional careers and personal lives. Some narratives follow the chronology of events; others highlight the most telling moments at random. Most narratives are marked for their dramatic performance achieved by the choice of linguistic, narrative and rhetorical resources.

4.3.1. Mona

4.3.1.1. Positioning level one – against the story actors

Story 1. Theme: Identity construction against the discourse of immigration

- Subtheme: Identity loss

Mona begins with an abstract, stating that she did not choose her career in educational leadership. The theme of non-agentive choice in her career reappears at critical moments in her life story's trajectory. She personifies her career as an agent of choice: "So, this specific story is how I ended up in this career (.), and it always makes me feel quite intrigued by how a career can choose YOU rather than YOU choosing a career."

Her identity construction through the narrative is punctuated by her references to the external forces shaping her agency, particularly at the crucial landmark moments. In her orientation, she talks about the relocation from the Middle East to the UK, the loss of her managerial career, and the need to make a new start.

I was working in the management field, (.) and it was TOTALLY different from education. But when I arrived in the UK, I was at a loss (.) as to where to start because (0.7) in the Middle East, the environment was very, very different. (.) There I was at a loss, and there was no such opportunity to continue where I had left my career in the Middle East.

The use of intensifiers “totally”, “very”, and the repetition of emotionally charged “at a loss” emphasises the contrast between the familiar and the unknown - her Middle Eastern management experience and the unfamiliar educational field, leading to identity loss (Le Gallais, 2009).

The complicating action is linked to the interference of an external agency, marked by the metaphorical use of “career” as an impersonal higher force “calling” on her to teach, thus regulating her career path without her agentive involvement: “So suddenly the career of education has started to call on me. (.) People () asking for me to consider teaching at a university”.

The use of the temporal modifier “suddenly” emphasises the accidental flow of events.

- Subtheme: Accidental career choice

The resolution positions Mona as non-agentive in her career move.

They looked at my CV (.) and background, and they thought that being a linguist with a Bachelor’s and a Master’s in Linguistics, I could be the right person to replace someone who (h) has disappeared suddenly at short notice.

The non-agentive stance is invoked by the repeated use of the third person plural, signalling higher forces, while the emotive “disappeared” instead of “left” adds to the dramatic tension of this landmark moment.

I was very reluctant, and they called me for a meeting to convince me that I was the right person. So, that's why I'm saying my current career has chosen me rather than the other way around.

Her agency is further downgraded by her own admission of being “reluctant”, “not the right person” and “being chosen”, rather than choosing herself, thus reinforcing her culturally aligned non-agentive stance against the story actors.

And that's the story I always cherish. (.) Because if you come across someone who would decide on YOU. You become grateful (.) and you try to do your best to live up to that expectation.

She evaluates her positioning as someone who appreciates being valued and chosen, while at the same time anxious to fulfil someone's expectations.

The coda concludes her story as a happy accident, leading towards a fulfilling career, thus emphasising the prominence of fate over the actor's agency. Linguistically, the importance of this fateful interference is reinforced by the use of epithets "huge, big": "So that's how I started, and I never looked back. That person was of huge, big importance to me."

Story 2. Theme: Emerging leadership identity and organisational culture

- Subtheme: Professional development

At the next narrative turn, her agency starts to emerge. In the abstract, she begins to plan her career by acknowledging the need to develop professionally to keep up with progress.

If you want to progress the way you want, you can either stand still or you must have a plan. (.) What we called at the time was professional scaffolding with regard to PGCE teaching diplomas, workshops, (.) feedback from colleagues and students,

Her agentic positioning is outlined by the actions she took to grow professionally, including the CPD, the feedback from colleagues and students, which she aptly calls "professional scaffolding", metaphorically equating her career to the scaffolding ladder.

Her professional growth and educational achievements have boosted her confidence, and she has started to actively seek out opportunities in more prestigious universities, as seen in orientation.

So, what happened later - my plan was (even though I was working at ____), I wanted to be exposed to other institutions, (.) so I started to look around to work in other places where they have a higher reputation to gain experience.

Her search delivers her a new, more challenging role in one of the top universities to match her ambitious and aspiring agency. However, taking on a new job results in identity regulation - balancing between the real and the performative self, metaphorically referred to by "acting" vocabulary – persona, stage, adaptation: "You change your persona. If you act, you are on a stage and the two personas are different, and you start to learn here."

- Subtheme: Emerging leadership initiating organisational culture change

She admits her agentic limitation: "I was a teacher, but there was a coordinator for all the languages". Thus, her emerging leadership identity is restricted by not being an appointed

leader. She was leading the team of Arabic teachers, but her role was not formally recognised.

Her attempts at finding a better position in a more prestigious institution are metaphorically described as “knocking on all doors”. Against the story actors (HR managers and department heads), she performs an assertive, confident and even arrogant figure, as she does not allow herself to be downhearted by the initial rejection: “It's OK, I don't take it personally. Who are they to refuse me?”.

In the complicating action, she succeeds in her efforts to secure a role in a higher-ranking university but positions herself critically towards the culture of the organisation she has joined.

They were not a team, (.) it was slightly chaotic. Everyone was doing their own work, very protective about their materials and resources. There was a lack of understanding of the culture and people. A negative culture, I think this was due to the lack of leadership at the time.

Her critical positioning points to the failures of the organisation through repeated use of “lack of” - “the lack of leadership”, “lack of team spirit” and “the lack of understanding”. While emerging as a culturally sensitive leader, she is being critical of the organisational neglect of Arabic, as a less taught language, which is not commercially viable. She uses direct speech for dramatic effect:

Management: Why should we invest in Arabic? ↑

Mona: You know, because there were two big boys at the time: French and Spanish. The two STARS! So, the rest was, you know (.)

Management: And these people always create problems.

She positions the management as dismissive of the Arabic team as problematic, “these people always create problems”, they are “not a worthy investment”.

Her motivation for changing the organisational culture from Eurocentric to more equitable comes to the fore in her account:

That was for me a very important objective and something that was missing at the time. The team wanted a leader, and they wanted a leader who could speak their language. They wanted a leader who was aware of their culture.

Her agentive positioning as someone keen to fill the cultural gap in the organisation is reinforced by the reiteration “they wanted a leader”.

The resolution comes with the change in management and the arrival of a “very vibrant, active, knowledgeable director with a vision”. This is when Mona’s role “started to crystallise a bit”.

And there was a restructuring of the programme (.) and all languages appeared to be treated the same. And a vision started to come into place, but they needed a lot of work (.) and also the team was starting to change.

The external agent – a new director - helped build a different, more equitable culture at the time.

- Subtheme: Authentic leadership identity control

In the evaluation, Mona positions herself as a competent manager who attempts to separate her personal and professional selves while dealing with conflict situations.

However, she also projects a dilemmatic figure – while exercising her authority as a team leader, she is anxious about not being accepted and respected by some team members.

I have had several specific challenges with some members of the team - one is very reluctant to accept me as her manager. She is dissatisfied with my feedback, and this situation has made her totally unhappy with my style of management. (.) So it started to appear as if it were personal. You continue integrating them despite the apparent attitude, which I find disrespectful. So, I put everything in writing, it's very important to make them understand that, (.) you know, they are still a valuable member of the team.

The reference to “attitude” and “disrespect” positions her as vulnerable and sensitive in relation to her team members, which is aligned with her authentic leadership qualities, but leads to identity control.

Her dilemmatic stance is also inferred in the coda – on the one hand, she acknowledges her role in developing the team, on the other hand, she references external actors, such as supportive leadership, people outside the organisation and team members for validation.

Well, I would like to take the credit, but I think any project is a puzzle, and it is teamwork. So, no matter how much (.) you can be fantastic, and you can be great, but if you don't have a supportive leadership, if you don't have a positive environment, you will not succeed ...

4.3.1.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: In-group/out-group identity construction

- Subtheme: Institutional versus cultural identity

In the here-and-now of the interaction with the interviewer, Mona's positioning shifts from being critical towards the policy of the organisation to justifying it as a wise commercial decision.

When questioned further about how she felt regarding the Arabic language being sidelined in favour of European languages, she is unwilling to frame this as a postcolonial practice (Soliman & Khalil, 2024), but instead claims financial implications and profit margins as the major factors, thus aligning herself with the managerial discourse: "OK, I always like to think or to perceive these matters on a professional level (.) and numbers were quite important."

At the same time, she recognises that the management has not done enough to foster the Arabic team's unique cultural identity by putting it together with "a bunch of other languages". Thus, she projects a dilemmatic in-group/out-group identity – on the one hand aligning herself with the managerial discourse and performing her institutional identity and on the other hand positioning herself as part of the Arabic team and embracing her Arabic cultural identity.

- Subtheme: Leadership experience through organisational change

Her positioning shift towards the organisation from being critical to being supportive and back is revealed in our discussion about the new contract – Academic Education Pathway (AEP), which includes elements of teaching, leadership and research.

While she seemingly supports the change, she reveals her anxiety and uncertainty about what this change means.

That's a big challenge and I think it's not only with me, (.) the AEP contract is still not very clear, the parameters are not clear to all of us. It has opened doors for ambiguities, and people start thinking about the research in their main role. We are not researchers. We teach and research is only 100 hours per year. So that's another challenge we have in the team. The repercussions and expectations are not clear.

By using collective and first-person plural pronouns "all of us", "we are not researchers", she seeks solidarity with the interviewer, claiming in-group identity (Taifel & Turner, 1978). She reiterates her concern over the implications of the AEP transfer for herself and the team. Not having a research background, Mona is anxious about her and her team's performance under the new contract. While countering the discourse of uncertainty, she reports identity struggle

signalled by the choice of vocabulary – repetition of “challenges”, “ambiguities”, “repercussions”, “expectations”, “not very clear”.

- Subtheme: Performing in-group solidarity while aligning with the managerial discourse

When I ask Mona’s opinion about the fact that only teachers on permanent contracts can be transferred to AEP with the advantage of having leadership and research included in the workload, Mona’s positioning is dilemmatic. On the one hand, she understands the commercial reasoning behind not awarding the hourly paid teachers AEP contracts, confirming her stance and alignment with the managerial neoliberal discourse of favouring market forces over human factors – “we can’t become a charity”:

As regards our hourly-paid staff. Our university worked so hard towards reducing the number of hourly paid people. There are so many factors that are taken into consideration. We can't become a charity.

While acknowledging the power imbalance in the structure “there is an element of power”, “certain elements of inequalities”, she re-confirms her beliefs in the organisational values.

But on the other hand, she objects to the inequity of the system and performs solidarity with the marginalised community of teachers on zero-hour contracts: “So this is a form of inequality, absolutely, and also, do we contribute to their pension, do we contribute to their annual leave, and are they allowed sick leave?”

By acknowledging the power inequality within the organisation, she constructs the identity of an ethically responsible leader (Northouse, 2015) with a strong moral compass (Rintoul & Goulais, 2010) and concern for her team members.

Her stance against unfairness is rendered stronger in the story about an hourly paid colleague from her team whose contract was not renewed due to her being a carer needing to travel frequently to a war-torn country: “That was for a very humane reason, OK that at least we should have supported her during this time. But she was on a zero-hour contract, so it was just not fair”.

Her agentive stance towards inclusivity also comes through the intersection of culture and ethnicity. By repeating “we have to listen”, she performs an empathetic, culturally sensitive leader:

In order to deal with the team, you must understand their way of thinking and their cultural background. We can't find good teachers easily, we need them more than they need us. Because we have to listen to them, we need to listen to them. And help them progress as well, making them feel part of the institution.

At the same time, the counter positioning of “us” and “them” – “we need them more than they need us” – puts her on the side of the organisation, thus claiming a dilemmatic in-group-out-group identity. Nevertheless, Mona’s agentic positioning gradually becomes stronger in the here and now of the interview world.

4.3.1.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

1. RQ1. How is female leadership identity constructed in the context of the Institute-Wide Language Programmes of UK Universities?
2. RQ2. How is leadership experienced through interaction between professional discourses of institutional change and curriculum review and personal discourses of gender, culture, and ethnicity?
3. RQ3. How do the participants’ identities shift from dilemmatic to agentic when resisting or aligning with dominant societal discourses?

RQ1. Mona constructs her professional identity against the discourse of immigration and identity loss, non-agently being regulated by external actors. However, her leadership identity begins to emerge when she takes on a coordinating role. While performing leadership alongside the appointed leader, she claims to be an assertive and confident figure against the discourse of leadership incompetence.

She performs authentic leadership identity against the discourse of neoliberalism and New Managerialism (Hill & Kumar, 2009; Lynch, 2014; Lynch & Ivancheva, 2015) while aligning herself with decentring and decolonising discourse in less commonly taught language teaching (Arday et al., 2021; Shain et al., 2023). However, in the course of interaction, her positioning shifts several times between being critical and aligning herself with the discourse of organisational change, new managerialism and neoliberalism (Ball, 2012; Deem, 1998) in the context of contractual inequalities for the marginalised community of teachers.

Through her critical stance, she invokes the neoliberal discourse of commercialisation of education and the discourse of Eurocentrism (Kasseem, 2024), which views Arabic as being “not in the same league” as French and Spanish and not commercially viable.

RQ2. Mona's leadership experience, shaped by the discourse of institutional change and uncertainty about the future, has resulted in identity struggle (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and her managerial role unpredictability (McNaughton & Billot, 2016).

Her gendered leadership identity comes to the fore through the intersection of culture and ethnicity, making her a culturally sensitive and ethically responsible leader (Northouse, 2016).

Her critical stance against the discourse of exclusion further shapes her leadership identity as a caring and empathetic leader, who listens and voices her colleagues' concerns and shares their needs for representation, fair remuneration and opportunity for career progression.

RQ3. Throughout the narrative, she makes dilemmatic identity claims of being authoritative, yet anxious about her leadership; of being agentive yet reliant on external actors in her leadership development; of being part of the institution yet rejecting some of its values. By making these claims, she gradually becomes more agentive against the discourses of inequality, unfairness, exclusion and managerialism, proving the transformative force of identity co-construction through narrative in interaction.

These stories, told through interactive remembering, illustrate the dilemmatic identity claims of agency limitation while countering the managerial discourse, performing the ethical leadership role and being covertly critical towards organisational values. Mona makes a dilemmatic identity claim of belonging to the organisation, and at the same time being critical of some organisational practices, countering the managerial discourse and performing the ethical leadership role.

4.3.2. Nina

4.3.2.1. Positioning level one - against the story actors

Story 1. Theme: Leadership experience through the discourses of gender, culture, anti-establishment and immigration

- Subtheme: alternative prestige and the discourse of anti-establishment

Like Mona, Nina traces her career chronologically, going back to her school years as the start of her leadership development. The story begins with an abstract: "I was a good student, but did not care for authorities. But the school still wanted me to do different roles."

She did not aspire to become a leader, but due to being a high-achieving student, she was promoted to leadership. However, in the orientation, she acknowledges the duality of her positioning as an appointed leader while at the same time acting against the establishment. She was “pushing the boundaries of authorities” and “seeking prestige” in alternative circles: “So, for me the prestige was to think differently and to be different from the others, so to speak, to choose a different road from the others”.

Nina’s positioning as “different”, not wishing to belong to the organisation, is reinforced by the metaphor “choosing a different road”.

I think as a teenager, you always want to act against the establishment. Any participation in the organised events or activities was looked down upon and even looked suspicious. So, this whole mainstream establishment appeared unattractive to me. Far from being important, I felt I needed to go against it. So, subconsciously, this feeling influenced my whole life.

Nina claims solidarity with the interviewer by using the second person “you” while making an out-of-group identity claim against the discourse of anti-establishment.

- Subtheme: Reluctant leadership against gendered expectations

She perceives educational leadership through the gendered and cultural focus – in the former Soviet Union, most school leaders were female and perceived by Nina as unattractive role models due to their masculine and authoritative leadership style:

There were a lot of women of different ages, who were in different leadership positions in education, some very important, high-ranking positions – Directors, Deputy Directors. (.) For me, those roles looked very unattractive.

The orientation introduces the change in society, caused by a political change and economic hardship in the nineties’ Russia, precipitating the change in values and educational prestige. Even though Nina perceived education as an unattractive career option, she was forced to take a lecturer’s position in a private university, due to a competitive rate of pay.

At that time, she started developing her identity as an educational leader, reluctant at first, but observing others and learning from role models: “I felt dissatisfied, although I had excellent examples, such as language teachers. They were my role models; however, paradoxically, I always felt that things could be done differently.”

She claimed difference, acting against societal leadership expectations: “There are people who are charged with energy when they stand in front of the stadium and people catch every single word they say. I cannot do it, don’t want to do it”.

- Subtheme: Imposter syndrome and the immigration discourse

The complicating action comes with her move abroad to continue her education and to build an academic career. She describes her educational leadership experience through interaction with immigration discourse.

Sometimes I felt scared and confused because you didn't know if you were following the right direction. It was scary to be without any structure. (.) This imposter syndrome is much stronger in women than in men. You come to a strange country, to a new environment, and you are asked to perform tasks which you feel are out of your zone of competence. This is depressing because you start pretending to be someone else, as this is a sink-or-swim situation.

She projects a dilemmatic identity of being “scared” and “confused” in a “strange country and environment”. On the one hand, she positions herself agentively by making a bold career move; on the other hand, she is constrained by the lack of direction from the institution where she works. She reports identity regulation by comparing metaphorically her freedom with “unbelievable lightness of being” on the one hand, and her anxiety with having an “imposter syndrome”, experiencing “depressing”, “sink-or-swim” feelings.

Story 2. Theme: Leadership against the discourse of new managerialism

- Subtheme: Career limitations

The story of Nina’s career development in the UK starts with an orientation outlining her frustration at the realisation that there is limited progression at a UK University language centre.

At the Language Centre, there was no career progression. It was frustrating to think that after 5, 20, 25 years, you were still going to do the same things – there were no opportunities for promotion, salary increase or new responsibilities.

At the same time, she reports being restricted by her caring responsibilities and conflicted about taking on extra duties - her professional identity is being constrained by the discourse of motherhood.

So, I started looking: are there any opportunities? Is it true that there are none? At that time, I did not want to have additional responsibilities due to the children being young. However, I knew that circumstances had changed, and 10 years later, the situation would be different. It was important for me to know that there was some development within the organisation. When you realise that there are none, (.) you feel as if your wings have been cut, (.) you feel somewhat detached.

The metaphor she chooses to describe her sense of frustration and alienation underscores the extent of her identity regulation: “My wings have been cut off”. The rhetorical question – “Is it really true?” – reveals her emotional response to the external factors limiting her career.

- Subtheme: Historical cultural educational discourse and agency limitations

However, her agentic positioning enables her to initiate the search for opportunities within the university structure. The complicating action comes with the discovery of the Academic Education Pathway (AEP) contract application scheme, for which she applies: “I was reading all these bulletins and newsletters from the university and just came across this new opportunity!”

The discovery of a potential promotional opportunity was made through the involvement of an external agent – a senior colleague who was successful in their application in the past. However, despite this “inspirational” intervention from the colleague, Nina’s agency is restricted by the management, which kept this opportunity hidden from her.

Why was I so upset? This is a psychoanalytical question, which I can never answer. So, when I saw this opportunity, I was really inspired. And my colleagues also confirmed that it was possible and encouraged me to apply. I was really surprised that it was never advertised in the department, and nobody knew about it.

While not overtly critical towards the management, she describes her reaction to the lack of promotion of the scheme as neutral, “surprised”. This subdued, rather than critical, reaction is a residue of Nina’s cultural background, reflected in the long-standing Soviet and post-Soviet traditions of authoritarian control and hierarchical institutional decision-making within the Russian Higher education system, suppressing individual initiatives (Elliott & Tudge, 2013).

The story is resolved by Nina submitting the application, describing it as a complicated bureaucratic process, which she had to navigate “blindly”, investing considerable time and effort into it.

I was navigating this process blindly, nobody in the management encouraged me to apply, everything was very opaque and not straightforward. Nobody actively dissuaded me from applying, but I had a feeling as if I was on thin ice.

The sense of uncertainty, anxiety and lack of transparency are emphasised by the choice of vocabulary – “opaque”, “not straightforward”, a metaphor of being “on thin ice”. The repetition of “nobody” creates a sense of isolation and alienation, thus revealing identity regulation by the organisation.

However, in the evaluation, her positioning shifts from being “surprised” to being overtly against the organisation – she refers to it as a “mockery”: “It is a mockery – the document bears no meaning or scholarship value – just a bureaucratic scribble”. Thus, her agentic and critical stance has started to develop in the course of storytelling.

4.3.2.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: Leadership identity construction from dilemmatic to agentic

- Subtheme: Critical positioning towards the organisational discourse

Nina’s identity is co-constructed in interaction with the interviewer. At this second level, I interrogate her positioning in more depth, offering personal insights and making encouraging comments. I can observe the shift in her positioning from self-analytical to more assertive and overtly critical towards the organisation. When asked about the application for the contractual change, Nina reflects on the process:

I think it is insulting for a lot of people, more experienced than I, who have to scribble away these applications. It is an incredible loss of human resources and time which cannot be regained. (.) The time spent on this process could have been better spent on CPD.

The use of colloquial “scribble” indicates her dismissive positioning towards the managerial process of completing a 30-page, heavily regulated document. Her agentic development is revealed linguistically – at the beginning of the narrative she uses more neutral and less emotive vocabulary for managerial discourse – “surprised”, “discouraged”, “depressed”, “frustrated”, towards the end she uses overtly critical and emotionally charged vocabulary to

describe the bureaucratic career limitations of the organisational management: “insulting”, “incredible loss of human resources”.

Her critical stance is further revealed through interactive positioning towards the interviewer. Despite referring to her professional identity as fully embedded within the university, Nina is critical towards its structure, which she describes as semi-feudal due to the hierarchy of power, thus invoking the discourse of new managerialism.

There is such a concentration of incredible brains at the University. It is very important for me to be able to collaborate with colleagues across the University, to make bridges and develop something. Even though the system is semi-feudal and hierarchical, you still want to feel part of the team and contribute towards the team’s development.

On the one hand, she enjoys being in the varied, intellectually stimulating environment, on the other hand, she is constrained by the managerial discourse and the glass ceiling effect: “What if all your efforts to go beyond your role fall flat and your enthusiasm vanes off? You feel like a cog in a machine which wears down through overuse and underpay”. Nina feels overpowered by being undervalued and unrecognised. The impact of career limitation is evident in her identity regulation, expressed metaphorically as “the cog in the machinery”, which “wears down” through overuse.

- Subtheme: Developing academic identity against gendered discourse and unmanageable workload

At the same time, she admits to being in a privileged position since she can afford to work part-time, have time for her family and for her scholarly pursuits. However, she is aware of this privilege and is sympathetic towards some of her colleagues who cannot afford part-time employment, as they are the main breadwinners.

If I had been a single mum and the only breadwinner, I would have thought twice before engaging in some additional unpaid university-related scholarship activities rather than getting another part-time paid job. Many people do not have this choice, while I have the luxury to spend weekends on my scholarship projects.

She positions herself as privileged, qualifying it as a “luxury” to write academic papers at weekends. However, her stance is critical towards the organisation, which allows contractual inequality, limited career opportunities and academic development for part-time employees.

I can afford to write an article at the weekend. But my fellow part-timers will go and get another income-generating job. They often have fractional work in different institutions and feel exploited, as this is physically and mentally demanding. To deliver a good class, you need time to develop. And women find themselves in a more vulnerable position than men, as they have to multitask.

By contrasting her “luxury” with the “vulnerable” positioning of her colleagues, she reaffirms her alignment with the anti-establishment discourse. By referencing the physical and mental strain of part-time workers, she invokes the discourse of exploitation by the organisation, which packs an unmanageable workload (Morley, 2013, 2014) into a fractional contract.

Nina makes gendered identity relevant as she invokes a postfeminist Discourse of difference (Lewis, 2014) and autonomy (Gill, 2014) by highlighting women’s ability to multitask and her privileged access to academic and financial capital. At the same time, she makes a stance against the Discourse of gender inequality (De Welde & Stepnick, 2023), admitting that women are professionally vulnerable due to limited opportunities for professional development.

- Subtheme: Identity work through interaction between the egalitarian and traditional gendered discourse

However, Nina’s egalitarian postfeminist positioning (Gill, 2014) becomes ambiguous through the course of interaction. She admits that she feels obliged to play a traditional family role of a caregiver and homemaker in addition to her professional role, as she earns less than her husband.

You earn less, so, subsequently, you have to do all the other duties. I feel that this feeling is in my head. This is just me. My husband is trying to be supportive. But this is how I was brought up. I have to look after everyone and everything at home.

While she acknowledges that the feeling is “in her head”, the caregiving is part of her cultural gendered identity. Despite her husband being very supportive, she feels compelled to take care of the home and the children – “I was brought up like this”.

Thus, she performs a dilemmatic identity of being agentive as a multi-tasker – mother, scholar and an educational leader on the one hand, aligning with the postfeminist discourse of difference (Gill, 2014), while at the same time being constrained by the traditional discourse of second shifting – performing the roles stereotypically assigned to women in addition to her professional role.

4.3.2.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

RQ1.

Nina's leadership identity is constructed against the discourse of neoliberalism (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020) and the "glass ceiling" effect of the institutional hierarchy and control (Williams, 2014).

She makes a non-agentive claim by referencing the "imposter syndrome" being stronger in women than in men, thus invoking the gendered discourse of difference and inferiority. She constructs leadership against the Discourse of gender inequality (De Welde & Stepnick, 2023), obscured by the postfeminist and neoliberal discourse of choice (Jones & Floyd, 2024).

While countering limited developmental opportunities and unmanageable workloads (Morley, 2013, 2014), she invokes the discourse of motherhood in academia. Her stance against the discourse of educational hierarchy and new managerialism is made more prominent through the prism of the historical development of Russian higher education and the tension between the established traditions and the Western educational model (Mercer & Pogolian, 2013; Oleksiyenko, 2022; Panova, 2008; Sigman, 2008).

RQ2.

She experiences leadership through the intersection of professional and personal by confronting the discourse of immigration, the gendered discourse of "imposter syndrome" (Leick & Köstner, 2024) and the discourse of motherhood.

Her leadership learning is experienced through positive and negative female role models and stereotypes – a senior colleague at the UK University who encouraged her promotion and negative role models of female academics constrained by traditional patriarchal gender discourse in post-Soviet Russia (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2017).

RQ3.

Her alignment is contradictory – on the one hand, she claims privileged positioning to be able to enact multiple identities of being a mother, a wife, an academic, a teacher and an educational leader; on the other hand, she is constrained by the traditional gender discourse of role stereotyping. Thus, she shifts her alignment between the postfeminist discourse (Gill, 2014) and gender difference discourse (Litosseliti, 2014).

Her stance against the Discourse of New managerialism (Lynch, 2015) shifts from being dilemmatic to agentic in the course of interaction as conveyed linguistically by the use of first neutral and gradually more emotive and critical lexis, thus confirming the transformative effect of the narrative in identity construction.

4.3.3. Aadab

4.3.3.1. Positioning level one - against the story actors

Story 1. Theme: Leadership experienced through institutional change

- Subtheme: Leadership prestige status

Aadab begins her narrative with an abstract declaring her current career status as a senior lecturer, followed by an orientation, which positions her as an ambitious and agentic education leader who values educational research as part of her professional identity. When she realised that leadership opportunities in an institution where she taught were limited, she moved to a different institution, where she was quickly promoted.

There were two pathways - lecturers for teaching only, and education scholarships- and I thought that was really good. I was at the University of _____, and they did not have any path of development for teachers who are researching education, only teaching. So, people were stuck there.

She qualifies her move as “really good”, as opposed to “being stuck” in her previous role. The reference to the change in title from “tutor” to “lecturer” signals the importance of prestige in her identity construction.

- Subtheme: Pandemic and critical positioning towards management

The complicating action is linked to the start of her leadership career as a coordinator, which also coincided with the pandemic. The challenging circumstances of external forces and the internal politics related to online education have caused her considerable stress.

Suddenly, you were supposed to teach in a totally different way, and we were not prepared. We have never done online teaching before, and the management was a bit chaotic. As language teachers, we had to be ahead of the faculty, (.) because they took a long time, like more than two months.

She qualifies the management reaction to the pandemic as “chaotic”, at a slow pace - “they took a long time”. Her leadership identity is constructed in the “us versus them” context. While acting on behalf of the management, she nevertheless identifies herself with the

community of “language teachers” and takes the lead in developing online teaching pedagogy without managerial support.

Resolution signals Aadab’s positioning as critical towards the management, signalled by an impersonal “they”.

They realised that teaching online is different from teaching in class, and they started pouring money into more workshops and trying to train teachers. That was a bit late for us, so we had to move ahead, trying to find our own way of doing this.

She uses the emotive phrase “pouring money” to describe the management’s late decision to start investing in training. At the same time, she projects an in-group identity of proactive teachers who had to look for an alternative solution.

- Subtheme: Leading without authority

In evaluation, Aadab dwells on the complexity of her role as a leader without authority, constrained by her role limitations in terms of decision making, while at the same time confronted by numerous responsibilities. The coda reveals her problematic leadership experience and identity regulation:

Manager roles? What is it? (.) The role is not that clear, and the job description is not clear. You don't exactly know what you need to do. You just improvise. And what are your responsibilities? And obviously, one other thing, don't you have any authority? You don't have any authority, so if you are working on a project or trying to work with the team or something, you can't enforce anything. (.) It's just like out of good faith. And if people like you, they will work with you, and you can accomplish a certain project. If people have issues with you, they won't cooperate, and that's it. You can't do anything about it. You can report to your senior, for example. But other than that, your role was not clear at all, and you don't have any power. And that was very difficult, (.) that was very difficult.

Her leadership development is being constrained by external factors, and she questions her role in this emotional narrative, dramatised by rhetorical questions – “What is that role? What are your responsibilities? Don’t you have any authority?” Her emotional response to her professional identity regulation is revealed linguistically through anaphoric repetition of negative structures “you don’t”, “you can’t”, “they won’t”, “they don’t”. The repeated qualifying phrase “that was difficult” reinforces her dilemmatic struggle of trying to be responsible for the team and their work, and at the same time not having a clearly defined status to assert her authority.

Although she positions herself as powerless, she shows her feminine leadership style of building good relationships with the team through “good faith”. Thus, she is learning how to lead by being empathetic and collaborative, emerging as a post-heroic leader.

Story 2. Theme: Leadership identity construction through interaction between personal and professional

- Subthemes: Middle manager’s positioning in a time of change

Aadab’s other story of leadership development opens with an abstract – she had to deal with conflict situations during the pandemic. The complicating action is linked to the colleague who could not cope with the pressure of teaching online during the pandemic. Since the colleague was on sick leave, she had to give extra work to other teachers to cover the teaching hours.

One of the colleagues went on leave because of Covid, and she felt that she was under a lot of stress because she could not cope with what we were doing. As a team leader, I was trying to adopt a totally new way of teaching - online, synchronous, asynchronous, and she felt that this was too much for her.

Aadab’s positioning as a middle manager is problematic: while performing her managerial role as instructed by the senior leadership, she is restricted by the managerial discourse in her attempts to empathise with the staff as a post-heroic, collaborative leader. This leads to her leadership identity stress due to the perceived sense of resentment towards her from her team and being caught in the middle:

In such difficult conditions, this led to resentment among other staff in the team, and other teachers because they were saying, “I’m stressed too, why should I work extra?” As a middle manager, you are in this awkward position between your colleagues, who you have responsibility for: you have to take care of them and manage them too. You are in the middle; you are being told off by your colleagues and by the management.

She evaluates her leadership experience in highly emotive terms:

I felt under a lot of stress after two years with no vacation, nonstop work for two years, and I felt burnt out. Definitely burnt out. I lost lots of my passion for work. You do because it was lots of pressure. No appreciation. (.) You can’t totally blame the management because we were all under the same pressure of Covid. But even after Covid, they just jumped over things and business as usual.

Her frustration is emphasised by the reiteration of key words – “difficult, stress, burnt out, nonstop work, pressure, loss of passion, lack of appreciation”. The “business as usual” continued after the pandemic with no release of pressure.

- Subtheme: Empowerment through community of practice support

However, despite the stressful and pressurised environment, Aadab is not overcome by external forces and the lack of managerial support. She agentively looks for solutions – allying with like-minded co-workers to support each other. This is a testament to her collaborative leadership skills. The story is resolved with Aadab seeking support from family and friends, making colleagues part of her family and friends’ bubble.

The rest of the team, apart from that person who went on leave, were very helpful. We formed a bubble, like a social and work bubble (.) to be able to work. (.) We needed to meet for work. So that was kind of supportive, yes.

In the evaluation, she is overly critical towards the university leadership, referring to it as an anonymous body in the third person plural, thus highlighting the “us versus them” paradigm.

I had to look for support from my family and friends. I couldn't get support from the university. They kept offering mental health support, but that was lip service. No more, no more. And my issues were basically work-related.

The leadership’s offer of help was no more than “lip service” and not “work-related”. Her frustration is further expressed through the repetition of negative “I could not”, “no more”.

This story of Aadab’s leadership learning is an example of dilemmatic identity work at the intersection of personal and professional, displaying agentive power while confronted by the Discourse of the pandemic and lack of managerial support.

4.3.3.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: Leadership construction against the discourse of new managerialism

Throughout the interaction, Aadab expresses solidarity with the interviewer, sharing the relevant experiences. To echo my story about the challenge of persuading colleagues to return to campus after the pandemic, Aadab contributes her story of how she led by inspiring her team to use the skills they learnt during the pandemic to improve teaching practices.

We worked very hard to get there. Being proficient and teaching online. (.) And now suddenly you want to take all this away, all our efforts! The students’ efforts as well,

because they too worked hard. They learned different skills. Now you want to take everything away just to get students on campus so they can pay money for accommodation. This is how I saw it.

While being compassionate to the students, she reinforces her critical stance against the university leadership by reiterating the phrase “You want to take this away”. She also positions herself critically against the commercialisation of education (Collini, 2017) in her reference to students’ accommodation generating revenue for the university. Thus, she projects an agentive and critical identity against the managerial discourse. When questioned about her strategy of voicing her concerns, Aadab is agentive:

I made myself loud enough, talking to the line manager. Saying, look, we did this and this. We worked very hard for this. Why can't we at least make it hybrid, or at least for half of the courses? I think the decisions are very central at a higher management level. They definitely didn't gather us and ask us: What do you think we should do? They didn't. They made the decision.

She is powerless in her attempts to get heard, even though she made herself “loud enough”. Thus, she projects the dilemmatic identity of being agentive yet powerless when confronted by the Managerial discourse, hierarchical governance and non-collegiate decision making.

She delves further into the superficial aspect of consultations and meetings with the staff, which to her is no more than a “box ticking” exercise: “They try to listen and hear what we say, there are lots of meetings. But to me, this is only box ticking”.

- Subtheme: Middle manager’s hybrid identity

When questioned further about her professional identity, Aadab qualifies her positioning as a “trapped” academic performing a hybrid identity as a teacher, manager and scholar for the same remuneration:

I think this is a kind of trap for academics, right? Because of more responsibilities, you, as an academic, are doing an admin management job while you are still teaching. And this is for one salary. Right? So, then you throw at me extra managerial duties on top of my work. Why? Why? Why should I do this? Either you take half of my teaching, for example, give me another role as a manager, or this should be reflected in my salary.

She experiences stress due to the number of conflicting tasks she performs, without the appropriate recognition. The repetition of “why” and colloquial “throw work at me” signals her emotional response to the pressure of her role.

Her identity regulation also stems from the conflict between her research interests and the lack of workload provision or contractual requirements to pursue research and attend conferences. This situation contradicts the educational leadership principles of the synthesis between leadership, teaching and research. Since her area of expertise is translation, and it is not part of the Research Excellence Framework (REF), she is not given any additional workload allocation for this.

Give me a chance to attend conferences, pursue research. However, this is not part of my profile. When I applied for a promotion, I included the conferences I attended, the papers I wrote. They came back to me saying, “Maybe you should not focus on this. You need to focus on your teaching journey”. Because my research is not part of REF. I'm a translator. I published a book, translated, but this is never part of REF. I do it at my own time, of course. But you're not allocated time to do this. You do it on your own terms.

Her academic aspirations and her status limitations imposed by the institution are evidenced by the feedback she received following the promotional application. Her positioning as a lonely academic, whose scholarship status is unrecognised by the institution, is framed by the repetition of “own”, “my own time”, “your own terms”. Thus, her academic identity does not fit the title which was assigned to her. By invoking the discourse of organisational bureaucracy, she highlights her middle manager’s hybrid role insecurity (Whitchurch, 2008).

- Subtheme: Identity loss at the intersection of personal and professional

When questioned further about her passion and enthusiasm for translation, Aadab reports identity regulation and intellectual dissatisfaction, which leads to the loss of her identity as an academic.

At the end of the day, this affects your intellectuality. This is my only way to keep myself stimulated intellectually. This is something I like to do, and I do it professionally. I can't just be a language teacher teaching 12 hours a week and that's it. This would affect me as a person.

The qualifier “just” and the quantifier “12 hours a week” refer to her attributing lower status to teaching than to research. The blurring of boundaries between personal and professional is reflected in the statement “This would affect me as a person”.

Through interaction with the interviewer, she constructs a leadership identity which is fragmented and dilemmatic – while aspiring to be a post-heroic, empathetic and compassionate leader, she is constrained by the managerial and teaching workload and the

lack of developmental opportunities as a scholar. Thus, she performs a hybrid identity of a “managed academic” (Winter, 2009) against the managerial discourse, highlighting her role incongruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

- Subtheme: Governmentality and “us versus them” positioning

When questioned about the workload allocations, Aadab explains how the workload is miscalculated for the benefit of the employers, by using the workload calculation SWARM (Simple Workload Allocation and Resource Management), which is conceived as a tool for providing workload distribution transparency. However, Aadab perceives it as a framework for exploiting the university teachers and middle managers:

Whatever duties they give you, it's always calculated as less work, right? For two hours of teaching, for example, (.) you prepare for another two hours, you mark exams for another two hours, you discuss things with students in your office hours for another two hours. So, it's not just two hours of teaching. You are always behind, right? And they always tell you, you need to add more duties because you have not reached your workload limit.

The passage is punctuated by the reiteration of “two hours” to make an emotional appeal to the interviewer against the accumulation of working hours. She seeks to confirm my solidarity with her stance by using tag questions “right?” and “you?”. By using impersonal generic “they” in reference to university management, and the repeated use of “us” and “you” versus “them” pronouns, she signals her group identification with “us” – the teachers, which also includes the researcher – “you”, as opposed to “them”, the management.

However, she is not overcome by the discourse of governmentality (Foucault, 2018; Gray et al., 2018; Morrissey, 2013). While interrogating the workload scenario further, Aadab and I co-construct her identity as someone who is empowered by her positioning as a Union representative, who can take a stance against authorities on behalf of her colleagues:

I can be very specific here because I'm a Union member. At one point, they asked us to calculate the hours that we work. And in this role, I was working 65 hours a week. Yet, my actual contract says 37 hours a week. So I was working double. Obviously, because you cannot combine all this in your role unless you work extra. I was on strike at the time. That was part of negotiating, teaching hours for staff.

- Subtheme: Leadership experience through the intersection of gender, language and ethnicity

In conversation with the interviewer, Aadab outlines her positioning regarding gender parity at work and her sensitivity towards discriminatory practices, which can be obscured. She takes an intersectional feminist stance, invoking the discourses of race, ethnicity and language as part of gender identity:

People in academia try to be very, very careful, right? So, they don't show you any discrimination. But at the end of the day, you feel it. You feel it as a woman, but, more importantly, as a non-White, non-British, non-native speaker.

Although proficient in English, she acknowledges her linguistic disadvantage against native speakers and the effort and time it takes for her to compensate for it as part of her managerial role. This sheds further light on the relationship between workload allocation and the English language proficiency of the members of staff, which creates inequality.

I am a good speaker of English. English is my second language, but in academia, it would take me double the time to write a certain email with good information. Words do not mean the same to you as they do to other native speakers, and therefore, you need to read your e-mail again and again and make sure that there's nothing offensive or nothing out of proportion. It takes me double the time. Same for writing a research paper. It takes you double the time, even if you are a very good, excellent speaker of English, you are always second to the native speaker.

The repetition of “double the time” juxtaposed with her self-identification as a “good”, “excellent speaker of English” emphasises her identity struggle. Her perceived role deficiency as “always second to the native speaker” projects a dilemmatic identity, overpowered by her lack of linguistic competence and the demands of the role.

She elaborates further on the effort and time it takes for her to achieve her role expectation, including promotion application: “Just filling the form, trying to put it in good English and trying to make it right to the point, and it took me like 3 weeks”.

- Subtheme: Tokenism, intersectionality and inequality

She discusses with me the problematic issue of her role incongruity against the university's strategic aim to increase the number of ethnically diverse managers to fulfil the equality charter:

Sometimes you feel that the university is pushing you to be promoted, or pushing you to do things or trying to put your picture on the website because they want to tick that box. Right? We have a woman. A non-white. Look, we have this at the institute, and this is very nice. But again, sometimes it's humiliating.

The repeated reference to “box-ticking” reinforces her stance against the organisation, which promotes racial, ethnic and gendered tokenism obscured by neoliberalism and new managerialism (Coleman et al, 2023). Her frustration at being identified as a token woman, non-white and non-British to fulfil the university quota is signalled by the use of “humiliating”. The effort it takes for her to match the role expectations is further emphasised by the emphatic “killing”: “I don't want to be there because I'm non-white or because I'm a woman. I'm killing myself here at work. I want to be there because of my work”.

- Subtheme: Organisational inclusivity versus individual loyalty

Despite the tokenism, she feels that academia is still run by the club to which she does not belong. The practice of not being invited to certain events or offered certain opportunities is more subtle rather than overt, thus hard to label as discriminatory: “When good opportunities come, it's always that club, right? Specific people who are chosen or who are invited to attend this or that thing, right? And you are not part of that club”.

Her in-group versus out-group positioning is strengthened by her experience of “not being part of the club” or not being perceived as sufficiently loyal to the organisation. She remarks on the institutional language change in recent years, shifting the responsibility of inclusivity from the institution to the individual, who needs to be loyal to the institution: “When you say loyalty, it's your job. Why are you not loyal?”

- Subtheme: Decolonising academic traditions

Her desire to be recognised as a researcher is further reinforced by the argument about the need for research to be conducted in Arabic to restore the balance of power within decolonising curriculum discourse. She aptly observes the contradiction between the popular university agenda of decolonising and the lack of understanding and recognition of the research output required to achieve this objective (Tamimi et al., 2024; Trahar et al., 2019): “People who are writing in Arabic are writing about themselves, but these sources are not included in Western research because the research is mainly in English”.

4.3.3.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

RQ 1.

Aadab's leadership identity is constructed against the discourse of new managerialism (Hill & Kumar, 2009), gender and cultural tokenism, marginalisation (Coleman et al., 2023; Arday, 2018) and the intellectual power hegemony, which creates inequality against non-native speakers of English (Brutt-Griffler, 2008; O'Regan, 2021). She is confronted by the discourse of academic elitism (Hughes, 2021; Evans, 2015) (not being invited to the club due to being a non-native speaker and not being able to use research as part of her promotion application), which leads to her academic identity loss (Le Gallais, 2009; Hanson, 2009).

Aadab constructs her leadership identity according to ethical principles (Northouse, 2015), while being authentic (Shamir & Eilam, 2005) and having an impact on the organisational values (Rintoul & Goulais, 2010).

RQ2.

Her leadership is experienced through the intersection of ethnic, cultural and professional aspects (Showunmi, 2020) against the discourse of ethnic discrimination. Her leadership learning is achieved through self-knowledge (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), rather than formal CPD, and she performs a post-heroic leadership identity of influencing others to achieve pedagogic excellence (Andrews, 2016; Northouse, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2019).

RQ3.

Her agency as an academic leader and a scholar, downgraded by the institutional discourse, causes tension between her imagined and prescribed identities (Billot, 2010). However, she is resistant to the new managerial discourse (Lynch, 2015) and develops strategies to counter the management decisions, leading her team to better working practices. At the same time, her positioning against the managerial discourse reflects her identity manipulation (Preston & Price, 2012), identity struggle (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and emotional labour (Iszatt-White, 2009) as a middle manager. This is conveyed by the references to excessive workload and expressed metaphorically as "killing" herself at work.

Her critical agentic positioning to the covert institutional discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender and language against the non-white, non-male and non-English native speakers' colleagues invokes the discourse of inequality through "us versus them" context (Davies et al., 2014).

4.3.4. Mila

4.2.4.1. *Positioning level one - against the story actors*

Story 1. Theme: Accidental leadership identity construction against the discourse of the pandemic

- Subtheme: Teaching autonomy as agency

Mila begins with an abstract declaring her accidental leadership identity (Floyd, 2016) and the way she started her career as an inexperienced leader, lacking in confidence and attempting to do both her work and the work of others, thus displaying heroic leadership qualities (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). She sums up her understanding of leadership with the phrase “Tomorrow the papers should be on my desk” as a command-and-obey relationship: “My leadership development started from the point that I did all the work myself on behalf of everyone because I was not able to say – ok, tomorrow the papers should be on my desk”.

In orientation, she indicates the opportunity for leadership learning instigated by an outside agent who challenges her leadership style. However, this learning experience is downgraded by her claim of not being a natural leader:

There was one person who once knocked on my door and said – Mila, please, do not help me with my work, let me do the work myself since I draw a salary for this. (.) I am not a natural-born leader, but I am a good teacher, and this is what I enjoy most.

This perceived lack of leadership agency is juxtaposed with her confidence as a teacher. She positions herself as an autonomous worker who values her teaching agency above all and is concerned about it being restricted by rules and regulations:

I was happy in the past because every teacher is an individual, and everybody has things they can do better than others. Now there are some processes, which mean that we have to make everything uniform and standard. For the past five years, I did what I wanted – textbooks which I wanted, plans, a programme which I wanted (.) I have the results that I aimed to achieve, and that is it, period.

The value she places on her teaching agency is signalled by the repetition “what/which I wanted”.

- Subtheme: Reluctant leader against the discourse of organisational hierarchy

The complicating action comes with the pandemic and Mila's sudden promotion by her line manager to be a coordinator since she was the most able and technologically skilled colleague.

She did not know who I was, but when Covid started, she called me in hysterics: What do I do? We are starting the year, and nothing is ready. So, I did everything for her, and she started promoting me everywhere.

She positions her line manager as distant and "hysterical", downplaying their competence - "What do I do?" and overplaying her own "I did everything for her".

Although she is critically positioned towards the hierarchy of the managerial structure and the bureaucracy, she accepts the role of a "reluctant coordinator":

There are so many bosses now, previously, I had one. Now they have created another ring of bosses. So, they have built some kind of a pyramid. I did not succumb to it. I do not like this admin work, I almost did not agree to the role of a coordinator.

In relation to her colleagues, Mila guards her personal space and does not wish to mix personal and professional spheres. She claims to maintain "normal working relationships" and draws the line when her colleagues try to cross it.

At first, it was a nightmare. There were endless nightly meetings. Besides work issues, I had to listen to their complaints. Once I got to know them a bit better, I started saying – let's not waste time. Find yourself a neighbour and complain to her. It was a nightmare, I used to sit with them all day. I was given financial incentives at the beginning, but then they stopped this.

The reference to the "neighbour" in the female gender is a cultural nod to the stereotypical Russian female pensioner, who sits outside the block of flats and gossips about the neighbours. She continuously downgrades the agency of her colleagues and portrays them in unflattering ways, which is a telling sign of her problematic leadership experience:

These grannies I work with always need fresh blood. Because I am group 4, my blood can be used by anyone, while I don't get anything in return, only a headache. They can rely on me, while I can only rely on myself.

She refers to the colleagues she coordinates as "grannies" and uses the metaphor "fresh blood" and her "group 4 blood" as irreplaceable, which further emphasises the high value she attributes to her teaching agency. She admits that she cannot rely on her colleagues, but they can rely on her, as her "blood group" means that it can be supplied to anyone.

Apart from the loss of autonomy, she reveals the increased admin duties as part of her leadership role, which causes her stress. Her resentful and dismissive positioning towards the teachers she coordinates is further reinforced by her characterisation as “untrainable” and “burdensome”.

One of them cannot even write an email to her students. She calls me all the time and asks for my advice. It takes a lot of my time. They have not been trained at all in the use of technology, at all! Some of them are already untrainable, instead, they are burdensome!

The reference to “burdensome” signals her struggle with the lack of leadership skills, motivation and training: “They have simply assigned this to me, that is it”.

- Subtheme: Uncertainty about teachers’ creativity in the face of technological change

The resolution leaves her uncertain about the future. Having worked hard to design her courses and help others, she is facing a new challenge – the college’s directive to engage artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching practices.

I don’t want any AI, I don’t want anything, I do not know what is going to happen next. I took enormous pleasure from this freedom. I could not even believe at the beginning that I could do what I wanted, that I may create something.

The autonomy she had before regulations came into place is contrasted with her resistance to accepting change. Linguistically, it is indexed by the use of emotive “enormous pleasure” against reiteration of the negative “I don’t want any”, “I don’t know”: “All was excellent, a creative fairy-tale but.... I have a bad premonition that this swamp is going to be shaken up”.

She evaluates her leadership experience by contrasting metaphors – “a fairy tale” for her creative agency and a “swamp” for the institution’s inertia. The organisational change, which involves new technological challenges, leaves her anxious about her future, indexed by “bad premonition”, leading to identity regulation (Alvesson et al., 2008).

4.3.4.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: Problematic leadership positioning of an assigned leader

In the course of interaction, Mila claims that she has not been affected by the change in her contract, but the fact that she returns to the subject on several occasions signals something

that needs to be unpacked. To clarify Mila's positioning with regard to contractual change, I have to dig deeper into the context of this change.

When asked about promotion opportunities, Mila reiterates her seeming lack of leadership ambitions but stresses her interest in designing teaching resources, which is not rewarded by promotion.

I have been offered a promotion, but I am not interested in more admin. I would like to write a book. They do not reject it, as always, they say it is a good idea, but they do not do anything. I know I can do it, why not support the creation of this course book?

By equating leadership with admin, she downgrades her agency as an education leader, placing higher value on the creative side of her job – teaching and developing resources. Thus, Mila positions herself as a reluctant middle manager who has been appointed to perform a leadership role but has not been trained or otherwise supported by the university management and whose voice is not being heard.

4.3.4.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

RQ1.

Mila constructs the identity of a reluctant manager (Scase & Goffee, 2017) performing a hybrid role (Whitchurch, 2008) against the discourse of new managerialism, following rather than influencing the university strategy.

Her identity is constrained by the discourse of organisational change, which includes layers of management control, technological innovations, and new role expectations (Billot, 2010; Briggs, 2007; Deem & Lucas, 2007; Smith, 2010; Sutton, 2015) leading to her agency limitation, role ambiguity (Schulz, 2013), disempowerment, identity conflict, and regulation (McNaughton et al., 2014; Hanson, 2009).

RQ2.

Her leadership experience is problematic. As a reluctant middle manager, she values her teaching autonomy above leadership and is anxious and insecure due to a lack of leadership skills. She struggles with the idea of distributed leadership (Fletcher, 2014) and has a very low opinion of the colleagues whom she manages. Her critical positioning against the university management signals her non-alignment with the organisational culture and “us versus them” discourse.

RQ3.

Through interaction and negotiation of meaning, Mila and I co-construct her identity as dilemmatic, wishing to be an autonomous agent yet constrained by the discourse of heroic leadership (Clifton, 2017). As an assigned and not an authentic leader (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), she experiences identity stress due lack of managerial support, a high volume of work and emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) linked to her role.

4.3.5. Faizah

4.3.5.1. Positioning level one – against the story actors

Story 1. Theme: Leadership identity against the discourse of employment, immigration and gender

Faiza's story begins with an abstract – she wishes to be honest and transparent with her account: "What you see is what you get".

The orientation sets the scene for her professional journey. She started teaching straight after graduating. When she got married and her husband was transferred to another town, she had to give up her position to follow him. The only jobs available for her there were teaching Arabic, for which she needed another qualification: "I contacted the institution, and I did the teacher training course just like a week after I got married. And I loved it. I graduated with an A star, so they employed me".

Although the outside agents – her husband and institution – act as antagonists in her narrative, she positions herself as agentive and confident in building her career. The use of short, telegraphic-style sentences to present the sequential order of events and the temporal quantifier "just a week" adds urgency and efficiency to the action. At the same time, the qualifier "A star", the repetition of the first-person pronoun and the emphatic "I loved it" emphasise the value of her success. Thus, she demonstrates her agentive power against the other story actors.

- Subtheme: Building a career in the face of adversity

She further constructs her leadership identity against the discourse of employment. In solidarity with a colleague who was unfairly dismissed, Faizah and a group of teachers resigned from their jobs. This was followed by her initiative to open a new school, where her

career developed “from teacher to senior teacher and the head of department towards the end”.

She narrates this story of leadership development in the face of adversity in a fluent, self-assured way. However, with the school being forced to close due to the lack of funding, Faiza’s initial success is overshadowed by the external factor: “So slowly, slowly they closed the department, which was very sad. So, I was the last one to leave, pack the whole department and leave”.

However, she is resourceful and seeks help from another financial body to open a new institution: “And the new school was established. So, I was the director and one of the founders”. Thus, Faiza constructs her leadership identity in the face of adversity and hardships, showing determination and drive.

- Subtheme: Acting agentively against the discourse of political uncertainty and immigration

The complicating action comes with the political and economic turmoil in her native country. However, while confronted by the discourse of uncertainty, she shows resilience to pursue her career in education. She moved to the UK to train teachers to teach Arabic as a foreign language while looking for a more stable position.

I've been approached again by the university, (.) to deliver the course and train the teachers. My husband didn't want to come to _____ and he said Look, you and the kids can go, because no one knew what was happening in _____ You know, we were all jumping out of the boat.

The turbulence of this period is conveyed metaphorically as “jumping out of the boat” as a sink-or-swim situation, invoking the discourse of immigration. While the husband is positioned as a decision maker, he is partially deprived of agency due to the interference of external forces.

The resolution comes as a “crucible experience” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002) when, after weeks of waiting for the job offer and having decided to go back to her home country, she finally receives the news.

While I was just checking in my luggage and giving my passport, I received a phone call. You are accepted for the job. So, I took my bags back and I left the queue, and I said OK, so what happens next? They said OK, we need a bank account in sterling that you've got £600 at least and an English certificate exam.

The scene at the airport creates dramatic tension, while temporality is conveyed by short sentence sequencing. The instability of her positioning as an immigrant is referenced by the restrictive conditions of the job offer, which she found hard to meet.

- Subtheme: Agentive leadership development against the postfeminist discourse of choice and status prestige

However, building on her success in finding the temporary role, she then successfully applies for a permanent post at a UK university: “And here I am. That's my life story in a nutshell. My husband is still (.) Yeah. My husband is still travelling”. Her husband’s agency is downgraded from being a decision maker to becoming a distant figure – “he is still travelling”, while she aligns with the postfeminist discourse of choice (Gill, 2014).

Her narrative concludes with an evaluation which positions her as a self-reliant, autonomous and independent agent. Faiza is a confident educational leader, proud of her achievements and her new title:

So, I have a new title and a new position, and I'm responsible for the whole department. I look after the whole Arabic programme. (.) I am responsible for the whole year abroad. I'm the main organiser of the whole year abroad, so my colleague reports to me.

The repetition of the words “whole”, “main” in reference to the remit of her role, the mention of a colleague who reports to her signal Faiza’s positioning as a powerful agent, who is concerned with her status and her title.

- Subtheme: Post-heroic gendered leadership construction

She reiterates her positioning as a collaborative, caring, post-heroic leader (Northouse, 2020):

You care about the job, you care about the people, but you also care about your image, you take your job seriously, and you care about the students and the performance of the students and the mental health of the students and the responsibility towards your colleagues and your self-respect. You know, how can I sleep at night?

The repetition of the words “care”, “students”, “people”, and “colleagues” in reference to her multi-faceted role invokes the discourse of gendered leadership and its’ feminine characteristics (Billing & Alvesson, 2000).

Story 2. Theme: Leadership learning through challenging experience

- Subtheme: Dilemma of loyalty and mistrust

The next story begins with an orientation:

We had a very challenging year. At the very last minute, we had to find teachers to cover. It is not easy. Lack of staff and the university management: they are tight with the budget. There are only three of us teaching Arabic. Two of us are on a full-time contract, and one is on 80%.

The complicating action comes with a colleague going on long-term sick leave. Since no additional funding was allocated to replace the colleague, the teaching workload needed to be covered by the existing workforce, putting pressure on Faiza. Additionally, she reports the increased responsibilities linked to her recent promotion and the element of mistrust and suspicion of the real reason why her colleague is absent. However, she is conflicted by this feeling as she realises that she is being disloyal to her staff.

I had a strong suspicion that there was more than an illness. But I cannot say, and I should not say this. But I felt let down. There are teaching hours and there is a job that needs to be done, and there is admin work that needs to be done, so you just do it, get on and do it, and you are responsible. So, you have to get this boat sailing and sailing in the right direction. But I love my job, you know? (.) I love my job very much.

The repetition of “need” emphasises the extra pressure she experiences due to increased workload and responsibilities. She reiterates “the boat” reference to signal the turbulence of her positioning. However, in contrast to the “sinking” boat connotation in the first story, this boat sails confidently in the “right direction”. Thus, the change of metaphors signals the enhanced agency developed through the narrative. At the same time, the repetition of “love” reinforces her emotional engagement with the role.

- Subtheme: Leadership learning through trust and a positive experience

An external actor, a colleague from a different university, comes to the rescue in the resolution, empowering Faiza to carry on with the task of organising a conference, which was originally planned jointly with the absent colleague.

Organising this whole thing - I didn't have a day off, but she was such a great help because, we sat together and we worked the programme out and she said no, don't worry, don't worry, don't worry and she has always this positive attitude of “don't

worry about it, we'll do it. It's going to be great". And yeah, it was. Look, it was fantastic. Now I can say it was a fantastic experience at the time.

With the help of an external antagonist, Faiza succeeds in the task and uses the experience as leadership learning, developing a distributed and collaborative leadership style (Fletcher, 2004; Northouse, 2020), learning to trust her colleagues and being encouraged by them. To highlight the positivity of this learning experience, Faiza uses emotive qualifiers – “great”, “fantastic”. The colleague who enabled her in the task is positioned as a comforting and reassuring actor, indexed by the reiteration of “don’t worry” in the reported speech. Thus, she has learnt to lead confidently from a notable person (Kempster, 2006) and a charismatic leader (Parry & Kempster, 2014).

- Subtheme: “Us versus them” – middle manager’s critical positioning towards the organisation

However, when things do not go to plan, Faiza reports extreme pressure due to the lack of support from the university management.

When is this nightmare gonna finish? When is this nightmare gonna finish? I was just like that. You know all that they can say: “You are doing a great job. Let us know if you need help”. Who's gonna reply to emails? Who's gonna write replies to emails in Arabic? Who's gonna contact colleagues from all over the world? Where are they gonna stay? And they have everything on the programme. You know, we've got links to where they stay. But people like to write and ask and get reassurance. “And if you need any training, here is the link”.

She reveals identity stress and regulation, as signalled by the repeated use of the rhetoric: “When is this nightmare gonna finish?” She positions herself against the university management as a middle manager who is being manipulated by the organisation (Preston & Price, 2012). The formal offer of help, “Let us know if you need any help” and the words of encouragement “, You are doing a great job” – sound cliché and insincere in contrast with Faiza’s real needs, emotively conveyed by the repetition of rhetorical “who’s gonna?” She refers to the offer of training as a formality – “And if you need any training, here is the link”.

Indexed by the pronominal third person, the management is deprived of agency and features as a distant body, lacking in understanding. Thus, Faiza’s leadership identity is constructed against the neoliberal discourse of autonomy (Gill & Scharff, 2011). The narrative highlights the widening gap between the university hierarchy and the concerns of the middle manager, creating a tension between “us” versus “them” positioning (Davis et al., 2014).

- Subtheme: Leadership experience through unmanageable workload and stress

Despite the lack of support from the management, her intrinsic motivation to succeed against the odds turned a stressful experience into a situated leadership learning point (Kempster & Stewart, 2010): “You will do a good job regardless of what happened. I had a frozen shoulder from stress and overworking. But you know, I floated in my boat, I floated, and I did it”. The repeated use of a “boat” metaphor in her stories illustrates her leadership strategies – from “sailing in the right direction” to “floating” to weather the storm.

Faiza evaluates the story by critically reflecting on her experience and sharing her views with her line manager: “I've had a meeting the other day and I said, look, I can't work like this next year. I cannot carry on. OK, this year has been exceptional, but next year we have to have a backup. If this person does that again”.

The repetition of the emotive “I cannot carry on”, “I cannot work” and negative characterisation of the absent colleague as “that person” – reveal her problematic leadership experience and identity struggle (Preston & Price, 2012) resulting from the unmanageable workload (Morley, 2013) and the institutional neglect (Floyd, 2016).

4.3.5.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: Identity construction through the intersection of gender and culture

- Subtheme: Motherhood in academia discourse

At the level two positioning, I interrogate the way Faiza experienced leadership through the intersection between professional and personal, specifically against motherhood in academia discourse (Morley, 2016). Her assertion of never interrupting her career for childcaring responsibilities has prompted me to ask further questions about the length of her maternity leave and whether it was her choice. She responds with a combative “I am a fighter” implying that it was not an easy task for her: “No, no, I'm a fighter. Yeah, with two children. You know, I only had maternity leave for two months and that's it. Back on 24 hours and the children used to go to the nursery”.

She had no choice but to return to work after two months of maternity leave – that was the requirement of the institution at which she was working at the time. She was in a precarious

position as a mother and a full-time employee – she could not reduce her working hours for fear of losing her contract.

I was in a very disadvantaged position. Otherwise, I would lose my job, you know, because our contracts as teachers were renewed annually. So, if I reduce my hours, I will never get the benefit of being one of the full-timers. And for me, my work was as important as my children and my family. I don't know if I'll go back, I'll do the same or not? But this is what I did. But I come from this generation where you get on with things.

She constructs a dilemmatic identity of an independent multitasker - “I am a fighter”, “my work is as important for me as my children”, while also being constrained by the discourse of motherhood and inflexible employment. Being confronted by the “double burden” of being a mother and an employee (Cotterill & Letherby, 2005), she makes gender visible and is doubtful about making the same choice again. By referring to “this generation”, she also makes gender relevant from the generational perspective (Favero & Heath, 2012).

- Subtheme: Postfeminist versus traditional cultural gender discourse

By being self-reliant and autonomous, she performs an emancipatory feminist identity (Butler, 2006). At the same time, her agency is limited by the discourse of hegemonic traditional gender ideology, which is culturally relevant to the Middle East (Gramsci et al., 1971): “I always believed that I have my own money and my own career. And I don't rely on a man. My husband used to call my dad and tell him, “I've got no control over your daughter anymore”.

While Faiza claims agency and independence from her husband in the story world, she reveals the underlying controlling power of cultural gender discourse of misogyny, where husbands and fathers perform the roles of guardians for their wives and daughters. Thus, the interactive element helps co-construct Faiza's leadership identity as dilemmatic, constrained by the discourses of gender and motherhood.

4.3.5.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

RQ1.

The two-level analysis identifies the key discourses against which Faiza and the interviewer co-construct her leadership identity. They are closely interlinked through the intersection of personal and professional. The dilemmatic nature of Faiza's middle manager's identity is

invoked by the neoliberal discourse of autonomy (Gill & Scharff, 2011) and the discourse of new managerialism (Hill & Kumar, 2009). While trying to be agentic in her leadership development and taking pride in her accomplishments, she is constrained by the lack of support and unmanageable workload (Morley, 2013, 2014), resulting in identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and emotional labour (Iszatt-White, 2009).

RQ2.

She experiences leadership in the context of the Middle Eastern cultural discourse (Gramsci et al., 1971; Afiouni, 2014) and the gender constraints of maternity and employment law. Her leadership experience through learning from notable people (Kempster, 2006) and learning to trust, delegate and collaborate during a critical period in her career has made her develop her leadership as post-heroic, distributed and gendered (Fletcher, 2004; Northouse, 2020).

RQ3.

Faiza's agentic positioning starts to emerge as she performs professional success against the discourses of unfair dismissal, uncertainty, political instability and immigration. Her emerging agency empowers her to push cultural gender boundaries and develop autonomy and independence against the discourse of misogyny (Koburtay & Abuhussein, 2021). Her agency, constrained by the cultural gender discourse, becomes stronger in the face of adversity, referenced by the emotive "I am a fighter".

4.3.6. Margarita

4.3.6.1. Positioning level one – against the story actors

Story 1. Theme: identity construction against the discourse of political and economic adversity, uncertainty and immigration

Margarita constructs her narrative chronologically, highlighting the main events in her career related to her teaching and leadership experience. Her story is narrated as a spiral with complicating actions and resolutions leading to evaluation and a coda.

She begins with an orientation – she started as a translator; however, to increase her employment opportunities, she also trained as a teacher and worked at a school in her hometown in Russia. She positions herself as a creative and accomplished teacher.

- Subtheme: Agentic development in the face of adversity

The complicating action comes with the economic and political turmoil in her country and the lack of career opportunities in the remote part of Russia where she lived. Like many young professionals in Russia in the period of the nineteen nineties and early two thousand, disillusioned by the lack of prospects in their home country, she looked for opportunities elsewhere. Thus, she started looking for a sponsored programme of study abroad through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and commercial enterprises:

Naturally, I had no money, the third out of four children in the family, with three of my siblings being students at that time. It was difficult because our parents supported us to make sure that we all studied, but there was no money for trips. So, I started looking for sponsorship.

The introduction of an antagonist who recommended her to apply for a particular scholarship brings an external actor into the narrative. However, the success was not immediate, due to the highly competitive nature of the scholarship: “I did not get it the first time. I applied three times and decided that if I did not get it the third time, that would seal my fate. However, the third time I was successful.”

- Subtheme: Agency constrained by imposter syndrome

Margarita’s perseverance and drive shape her identity as a “fighter” who is not swayed by losing and is keen to win against all odds. However, she reports being constrained by the feeling of insecurity and self-doubt, teaching English, the language and the culture of the country she has never been to:

I have never travelled abroad, and I have always felt like an imposter – I am teaching the language and culture of the country I have never been to. I was surrounded by people who had been there, and I have always felt like an imposter, as I did not fully know what I was talking about.

The claim of having an “imposter syndrome”, compromising her professional success as a teacher, signals a dilemmatic identity – being agentive, yet subjected to external forces – adverse economic conditions in her country and internal constraints caused by professional self-doubt.

The resolution comes with her decision to accept the offer, which she justifies by economic needs: “So, I went with this programme to work, gain experience and study. Everything was funded by the _____ government. I only had 200 in my pocket”.

- Subtheme: Dilemmatic identity against the discourses of immigration, economic hardship and societal expectations

Having stayed abroad for a year, she realised that she could not continue to study and work to support herself. She is conflicted by the need to decide between continuing to struggle or facing an even worse economic situation and unemployment in her home country, which forced her to emigrate. Her story reveals the dilemmatic identity claim of wanting to be agentive, yet constrained by the discourse of immigration, uncertainty, economic hardship and unemployment.

You are working, but you are not investing in a pension; the salary covers just shared campus accommodation. It was still better than in Russia. Because at least you have a job here, but in a few years, I would have been 37/38, without a home, without a personal life, without a pension or proper salary. I had just enough to pay rent and the bills for living on campus, and put a bit of money aside for travelling home to Russia.

The reference to her age implies anxiety about the future. In Russian culture, this is the age for young people to have secure jobs and well-established families. Thus, her identity is regulated by the gendered cultural expectations and the discourse of failure by not fulfilling the societal norms of being married, having a home, and having a “proper salary” by a certain age.

- Subtheme: Professional identity construction against the discourses of reverse immigration, nepotism and unfriendly academia

The second complicating action comes with her return to Russia, where she found herself at another career stumbling block – the need to adjust to different cultural, social and professional environments.

Here, I understood that I have to start everything from scratch. Nobody knows me, I cannot find a position anywhere, in Moscow, everything operates differently, and no references from foreign universities work. You need to know people who can make the right call to the right person on your behalf.

She is confronted by the discourse of difference, employment nepotism and lack of transparency. This is revealed linguistically through the reiteration of the negatives “nobody”, “no reference”, “I cannot”. She is also overcome by the adverse academic discourse – her research topic is outside of the standard academic framework of Russian academia, and she

cannot find a suitable mentor to develop her scholarship. Thus, despite being agentive in pursuing her academic goals, her identity is overcome by the discourse of reverse immigration, unemployment and lack of academic support.

- Subtheme: Identity construction against the discourse of uncertainty

The resolution comes after a long deliberation and search for another position abroad, which she eventually found at a UK university. However, as she applied for a working visa, the geopolitical climate changed, and Russia was sanctioned following the annexation of Crimea. She was facing uncertainty due to the adverse political situation, and her anxiety was manifested physically:

The summer was very nerve-racking. I lost a lot of weight. There were problems with the visa, I was very worried. The university demanded the decision, but this was outside my control. But thanks to God, I received this visa.

Her reference to events being “outside my control” is indicative of the dilemma of being agentive yet overpowered by external forces. Her identity stress is clearly revealed through the reference to the physical and emotional strain she was under due to the pressure from the university and the discourse of uncertainty.

Story 2. Theme: Leadership identity construction against the discourse of covert discrimination

The next story encapsulates her career at a UK university and the barriers to her professional development in the context of the IWLP.

- Subtheme: Professional development within the culture of academic neglect and unmanageable workload

In the abstract, she describes her struggle to develop her academic identity:

I thought that was the place I needed to be to pursue my academic interests, however, it was my first culture shock. It turns out that the institution I was working at was not interested in my academic development.

In orientation, she draws the picture of how she felt discouraged by the lack of interest in her research ambitions and the lack of support for her professional development.

It was very strange because everywhere I had worked before, I was surrounded by a mentorship environment. The senior colleagues would always hurry you along,

encouraging you to write, publish, banging on about research. Here it was zero. When I arrived, nobody talked to me, nobody sat me down and asked what I wanted. They gave me a pile of work. And of course, I took it all because I was young, I was interested in how things worked there, and I did not have children at that time. So, for the first year, I did nothing but teach, I was overloaded with work.

She struggles with an unmanageable workload, as conveyed by the choice of metaphors – “banging on”, “pile of work”, “overloaded”. She is positioned by the institution as a young, childless employee who can handle a higher workload than her colleagues. Thus, she constructs her identity through the interaction between gender, age and professional aspects, highlighting the identity work in the context of covert discrimination against age and lack of child-caring responsibilities.

- Subtheme: Identity construction against the discourse of covert gender and age discrimination

Margarita claims solidarity with another colleague, who is positioned similarly by the institution: “We were struggling to keep our heads above water, there were no curriculum guidelines, no educational objectives, and we were feeling our way in the dark. I felt awful.” The use of metaphors like “keep the heads above water”, “feeling our way in the dark” invokes the discourse of uncertainty and identity struggle.

The complicating action comes with the offer to lead a summer programme for the students abroad. As she was only contracted for 10 months per year, this summer role would have been unpaid. She also realises that nobody wants to take on this role, as it involves a lot of unpaid work.

They told me it was a good position for you, as a young employee. I was not young, I was not junior, I was meant to be at the same level as the others. But nevertheless, I was told that as a young colleague, perhaps I would be interested in the role, however, it was not paid.

Her role incongruity is revealed through the juxtaposition of her claim to be equal with the other colleagues and the way the departmental management positions her as a young employee who can work long hours. “Young” and “junior” are translated into Russian as “молодой” and “младший”, but colloquially, they are used interchangeably, thus making no difference between age and rank of seniority. Although still young, Margarita wishes to make a point of separating the two notions in her stance against being pigeonholed into the stereotypical junior employee role.

- Subtheme: Agentive action against unfair employment conditions

She accepts the role as a development opportunity, willing to learn leadership skills.

However, she also campaigns on behalf of her junior colleagues for improvement in their employment conditions. Her leadership identity is constructed through situated leadership learning, leading a campaign for fair pay.

The story is resolved by the university management reviewing her and her colleagues' contractual conditions and awarding them full-year contracts:

Now all the tasks we had to do in our spare time are clearly outlined in our contracts. We also insisted on including in the workload things like decolonising teaching materials, creating inclusive resources and training for working with students with learning difficulties.

The new contract also allowed Margarita and her colleagues the opportunity to apply for enabling roles and academic promotion. She talks proudly about these achievements, outlining the steps she took towards this success. However, she admits that although she and her colleagues were empowered by the outcome, the process was fraught with great efforts and obstacles:

It cost us a lot of effort to formulate our demands and put them forward. We had to fight against inequality in terms of teaching versus research contracts. However, to get further promotion, you need to prove that you have made an impact at the institutional or departmental level. This is something not available to us. Although I am allowed to apply for internal positions, without experience, I do not get these roles.

- Subtheme: Middle manager's role demands and restrictions

Her leadership identity is developed through "us"—junior teachers—versus "them" — university management - opposition in a conflict and combative situation. She reiterates that she has missed out on gaining valuable scholarship and leadership experience while being on a teaching-only contract:

It was very hard — I wrote and talked a lot about it — it is not my fault that I could not apply for these roles — my contract did not allow me to do that. So, what can I do now? But the fact remains — the competition is high; the roles are limited, and everyone needs experience.

Although willing to take on leadership roles at the university level, she gets rejected due to a lack of experience, thus displaying the dilemmatic leadership identity claims of wanting to be

agentive yet being restricted by external forces. Her role as a coordinator–middle manager at the level of her language unit does not lead to a pay rise but to a higher workload: “I only get 80 hours per year for this leadership role. This is very little, just ten per cent, or even less.”

4.3.6.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: Leadership identity construction through the intersection of personal and professional

Margarita positions herself in relation to the interviewer as an empathetic interlocutor, indexing solidarity by reiterating statements and confirming opinions throughout the interview. The interactive element has helped me delve deeper into the intersectional nature of her identity construction against the discourses on immigration and motherhood.

- Subtheme: Leadership development against the discourses of immigration, perceived discrimination and academic exclusion

When I ask her to elaborate on her professional and academic development, she responds that she still feels like an outsider in the world of academia:

I do not feel any encouragement from anyone – I still feel like an outsider. All of us who teach languages are immigrants, we have not been part of the establishment, we need support and mentoring to explain how things work and what one needs to do to develop and grow. So, it takes time and effort to figure this out. There is no help from anyone. Without help from senior colleagues, you do not have a voice at all in any leadership decisions. It is part of their role to support and mentor you, but not everyone does that.

While claiming her in-group alignment with the majority of the colleagues in her department who are immigrants and language teachers, she makes a counterclaim that they are not being heard by the university leadership. As a result, her agency is being restricted by the university management through the discourse of immigration, academic exclusion and perceived discrimination (Ayala-López, 2018; Kebabi, 2024).

She positions herself as a middle manager and an outsider in the organisation, which is neglectful of her professional development. This concurs with the findings of middle managers’ studies being referred to as Class B or third space academics (Whitchurch, 2012). This narrative outlines the gap in shared values between the university and the middle managers (Schein, 2010). This gap is conveyed linguistically through “us” versus “them” opposition and the use of negative structures – “I do not feel encouragement”, “we have not

been part of the establishment”, “there is no help”, “you do not have a voice”, “not everyone does it”.

- Subtheme: Middle manager caught between two greedy organisations

When I encourage her to talk about her motherhood experience, she reports identity stress resulting from conflicting professional and caregiving demands. She insists that if she had not had her mother coming from Russia to help, she would not have coped well when she had to return to work after her maternity leave.

If my mother had not come from Russia to support me, I probably would have managed, however, I would have damaged my physical and mental health. It was still a big effort with her help, but at least I did not have a breakdown. Because the hours were fixed. I would not have been able to pick up my child from the nursery on time. It was a complicated period.

The stressful experience of being a mother and a university employee is indexed through vocabulary choice – “damaged physical and mental health”, “big effort”, “breakdown”. She was left with no choice – although she was formally allowed to work flexibly, the provisions were not made to make reasonable adjustments to her timetable:

The timetable is a puzzle which cannot be solved. I have to compromise. So, what can I do? There is nothing I can do. The reality of university work is different from HR policies. Besides having leadership responsibilities, I had to come out of my maternity leave on some days to coordinate the newly hired colleagues’ work.

She signals her powerlessness against the organisational discourse by using the rhetorical “What can I do?” and answering negatively: “There is nothing I can do”. Thus, as a young mother, she is caught between two greedy organisations - motherhood and academia (Morley, 2000b).

- Subtheme: Professional development limitations due to covert discrimination

While being on maternity leave, she also missed out on potential career opportunities, claiming identity regulation by covert discriminatory practices:

I stopped receiving notifications of vacancies and opportunities which appeared during that time. They claim this is because the management does not wish to bombard you with non-relevant emails. I call this discriminatory as we have to apply a year in advance for any grants or any positions, and I have missed out on all of these

applications because they claim they did not want to bother me. The thing is, it was made out as if they were considerate to me, but in reality, they were discriminatory.

The narrative invokes the concept of motherhood in academia. Margarita is being disqualified and dismissed from reaching leadership positions, being confronted by conflicting family and university discourses (Morley, 2013, 2014, 2016). Margarita claims a dilemmatic identity of being aspirational in her academic and leadership career while being constrained by managerial and motherhood discourses.

- Subtheme: Identity construction through the intersection of ethnicity and nationality at a time of curriculum change

Ethnicity is another aspect of her identity that is brought into focus through our interaction. The new curriculum requirement in all UK universities is to review all subjects taught, including languages, from a decolonising point of view. Decolonisation of Russian language teaching is a complex and controversial concern (Nasibullov & Kopylova, 2022). I am interested in how Margarita responds to this curriculum requirement through her leadership experience:

The process is ongoing; we have to meet and discuss this, observe each other's classes, review materials, but this is all formality. As I come from the far east of Russia, I do not look ethnically Slavic. (.) People enter the room, notice my skin colour, and immediately ask – Why am I teaching Russian? I often get complimented on how well I speak Russian! Sometimes I get mad. This has become part of my life; I have learnt to cope with this. Every day, I have to decide – this should not upset me, so I have this internal mechanism which helps me cope. But I have to make an effort. I talk to my students about it, so they understand how I feel ethnically, not Slavic, but Russian at the same time. So, I play my personal part in the decolonising process.

Her ethnic and national identities are put into question by the discourse of ignorance and covert discrimination (Kebabi, 2024). Margarita is positioned as a non-Russian through politically loaded questions and statements, “Why are you teaching Russian?”, “You speak Russian so well”, ascribing her a foreign identity.

However, she defies this ascription by asserting her identity and turning this into a learning point about ethnicity and culture. She has created her internal coping mechanism, which helps her resolve emotional distress caused by the questions about her origin and the need to justify her Russian national identity.

Thus, in conversation with the interviewer, we discover another aspect of her dilemmatic identity – wishing to be identified by her nationality as a native Russian (her language being a nationality marker) while being rejected on the grounds of her non-Slavic appearance.

- Subtheme: Identity enacted through language and excluded on the grounds of ethnicity

Margarita and I agree that decolonising includes recognition of ethnic diversity as part of a national identity (Winter et al., 2024) while acknowledging the unity of Russian as a national language. Together we recollect the time we met at a conference for teachers of Russian. Margarita was struck by one speech in favour of protecting the purity of the language and culture against non-ethnic Russians:

It was a striking moment. I turned around, and I was the only non-white person in the room. And nobody felt uncomfortable about this statement – protecting the purity of the language against the non-ethnic! As you know, we do not even have dialects in Russian. Because of the rigid centralisation of the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union, we have no differences in accents across the whole country.

This episode further illustrates Margarita's positioning as an outsider in the "us" versus "them" paradigm. While being part of the professional community – teachers of Russian – she was made to feel like an outsider, labelled as non-ethnic Russian. This narrative invokes the discourse of academic exclusion based on ethnic differences (Moncrieffe et al., 2024; Kebabi, 2024).

Thus, through interactive remembering, we reveal the multifaceted nature of Margarita's dilemmatic in-group and out-of-group identity (Taifel & Turner, 1978; Bamberg, 2011) – being part of the institution and being an outsider due to her immigration status; asserting her national identity through her native Russian language while being rejected as an outsider on the grounds of her ethnicity.

4.3.6.3. Positioning level three – against the societal discourses and research questions

RQ1.

Margarita constructs her leadership identity as a middle manager operating in the teaching-led department through the intersection of personal and professional discourses.

As an aspiring scholar, she struggles to develop her academic identity against the discourse of hierarchical managerial culture (Davis et al., 2014), organisational neglect towards middle managers (Floyd, 2016) and being positioned as a third space professional (Whitchurch, 2008).

Her agency is also constrained by the discourses of academic exclusion and perceived discrimination on the grounds of her ethnicity and nationality (Ayala-López, 2018; Kebabi, 2024).

Her leadership identity is constructed against the discourse of age and gender discrimination. While resisting the workload intensification and career limitations (Morley, 2013), she develops leadership agency through situated learning (Kempster & Stewart, 2010).

RQ2.

As a middle manager, she experiences leadership through critical positioning towards the organisational values and non-alignment with the dominant institutional managerial discourse. Her leadership learning empowers her to resist the discourse of New Managerialism (Hill & Kumar, 2009) and develop a strong “us” versus “them” identity (Davis et al., 2014).

RQ3.

Margarita projects a dilemmatic identity against the discourse of motherhood in academia. While aligning herself with the neoliberal discourse of choice (Gill, 2014), she is overpowered by the two “greedy organisations” – family and university (Burchielli et al., 2008; Jones & Floyd, 2024; Morley, 2013, 2014) and the discourse of sexism (Savigny, 2014).

The narrative reveals her dilemmatic positioning as an outsider, experiencing the out-of-group identity struggle (Taifel & Turner, 1978; Bamberg, 2011). On the one hand, she feels excluded from academia on the grounds of immigration and motherhood; on the other hand, she is being denied her national identity based on her ethnicity. However, she develops an agentive force through “an internal coping mechanism” which helps her identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002),

4.3.7. Jaleela

4.3.7.1. *Positioning level one – against the story actors*

Theme: Leadership identity construction through the intersection of gender, ethnicity and status against the discourse of hierarchy and the glass ceiling effect

- Subtheme: Leadership learning through training and experience.

Jaleela constructs her narrative, focussing on the subjects which are pivotal to her leadership development. She starts the story with an orientation, taking a postfeminist stance of autonomy and choice (Fletcher, 2004), while observing discriminatory practices at her university against gender, ethnicity and status.

I was in a meeting where a female colleague from a Middle Eastern background was talking, and she was listened to differently from the way a man was talking. The background is really important. Who is speaking, from what position, and where is the speaker from? What is their title, and what is their gender? But I didn't have any problems progressing in my career. I could make my own choices.

Her positioning against gender, ethnicity and status discrimination is linguistically marked by the intensifier “really”. She reflects on the topic of having a voice and being silenced by posing rhetorical questions: “Who is speaking, from what position, where is the speaker from, what is the title, what is the gender?”.

However, her postfeminist stance (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020) – “I did not have any problems progressing. I could make my own choices” - is conditioned by the outside actors supporting her. For example, providing leadership training, such as Aurora, which is a HE leadership development initiative for women:

As women, we still feel that who's speaking is important. I did the Aurora course. And it was a really, really good programme. Really good. Gave me confidence, because I felt I really needed it. To have more self-confidence as a manager. They were happy that I'm doing it because, when you have a good team around you and you are a good line manager, they support you, they need you. They know what you need, and they support this. So, it was really good. I had a mentor. She was very supportive as well.

The narrative reveals the importance she assigns to her leadership development through training and mentorship. Linguistically, this is conveyed by the repetition of the intensifier “really” and the positive qualifiers “good” and “supportive” in relation to her mentor and the

university management. Thus, she aligns with the university leadership, which invests in her training and progression.

- Subtheme: Institutionalised “othering” on the grounds of gender and ethnicity.

At the same time, the opening line of the narrative – “Who is speaking is important” - reveals the dilemmatic out-of-group identity claim. While seeking gender solidarity with the interviewer by using “as women we”, she identifies with the women in academia who are often not heard and positioned as outsiders (De Welde & Stepnick, 2023).

Jaleela’s line manager is a critical antagonist in her story of leadership development, enabling her to take time off for the training. However, the story evaluation is ambiguous. Although Jaleela positions her line manager and the training mentor as supportive, she admits that the support only goes halfway and is limited to short-term goals.

I approached my line manager and my mentor at Aurora. I said Look, this is my long-term plan, and these are my short-term objectives. I'm going to do this, this and that to achieve that. But I have a long-term objective, and I need your support. They know the organisation; they know where I need to go. They need to support me to open doors for me or to guide me. There are things I can't do on my own. But they can't help me. It's a hierarchy; there is no space for others.

She constructs a dilemmatic identity – while being empowered and agentive in her role, she is constrained by the discourse of managerial hierarchy and the glass ceiling effect (Cotter et al., 2001; Mullany, 2022; Williams, 2014). While she downgrades her agency, linguistically conveyed through the repetition of “I need”, the agency of the organisation is enhanced by the repetition of “they know” and the use of the metaphor “they need to open doors for me”. Despite her claim of being agentive in her leadership development, she is positioned by the organisation as “the other”, different, not belonging to the club, confirming the institutionalised “othering” practices (Jones, A. et al., 2021) and lack of proper support.

This problematic balance between the academic manager and managed academic (Winter, 2009) reflects Jaleela’s positioning as a Class B or third space middle manager (Whitchurch, 2008), unable to break through the glass ceiling of the managerial hierarchy.

4.3.7.2. Positioning level two - the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: Post-heroic leadership development – learning to lead by supporting others while lacking management support

- Subtheme: Middle manager's hybrid identity construction against the discourse of institutional neglect

I help co-construct Jaleela's identity by sharing personal leadership stories and experiences. She positions herself as a post-heroic, empathetic, collaborative leader who recognises feminine traits of gendered leadership as a powerful capital (Elliot & Stead, 2008). She is flexible, accommodating and empowers her colleagues by developing good relationships with them.

Whenever I can take the pressure off colleagues, I'll do it. The first thing is to develop a good relationship. (.) So I make myself available to fit into their timetable. You need to see what works for others as well. I know when they need to be supported, I need the time that they need to be listened to.

She learnt how to lead by being culturally sensitive and listening to her colleagues: "You learn about their ways, you know about their cultures, and you know about how things are done in their own way, but you also need to be in control of things".

She acknowledges that she developed this style of leadership through training and lived experience, but it does not come naturally to her. Empowered by her training, and in contrast with the half-measured support that she receives from her management, she offers practical steps to support her colleagues' professional development:

Colleagues who are interested in research, we meet, and we have our time for writing and then we share. I'm very happy with this writing retreat for colleagues. So, we also give a safe place for people to present. I remember myself when I needed confidence at the beginning, I needed a little bit of support every now and then. Everybody feels supported, I started this idea myself. I organised it myself.

Her agentic positioning in her colleagues' development is emphasised by the repetition of "I", "myself".

- Subtheme: Identity regulation against the discourse of organisational contractual change and unmanageable workload

However, she admits that she must use her weekends for this work and acknowledges the unmanageable workload she has encountered.

I use my weekends. I know this is not healthy. But at the same time, it reduces the pressure during the week. I work weekends. We have workload allocation, but it is never enough, really. So, in a different pathway, we have allocation for some hours. But you know, if you want to progress in your research, these hours are not enough. And then in the end, your research is for you.

Jaleela reports her identity stress and regulation – she wants to be an academic mentor for her team, yet her own academic ambitions are not fulfilled. The reference to “pathway” (Academic Education Pathway – AEP) and “some hours” allocated for research reveals her problematic “hybrid role” positioning (Whitchurch, 2008). Her role is meant to combine research, teaching and managerial responsibilities (AEP). However, she is restricted in her academic development due to excessive and unmanageable workload and managerial neglect.

The AEP has been designed as a reward mechanism for teachers and managers to fulfil their academic ambitions and enable career progression. However, the neoliberal (Hill & Kumar, 2009) nature of this contract – “your research is for you” - does not allow the employees to fully engage in all three activities in equal measure. This leads to identity regulation and stress (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) for middle managers, like Jaleela, forcing them to work overtime and at weekends to achieve results.

You can present at a conference and say you achieved your objective. Or you can go beyond this and publish. This is your decision, but we will only give you this many hours to do that. Where do you want to take your research? We have an objective to meet at the end of every academic year related to research or scholarship activities. But this is really up to you.

The managerial stance regarding the AEP contract is conveyed through reported speech and invokes the neoliberal discourse of choice (Gill, 2014) – “this is your decision”, “this is up to you”. However, Jaleela’s choice is restricted by the regulated managerial practices and governmentality (Morrissey, 2013) – “we have an objective to meet”, “we will only give you these many hours”. Thus, she reconfirms her dilemmatic claim of being supported through training and yet disempowered through managerial restrictions.

4.3.7.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

RQ1.

Jaleela constructs her leadership identity through the intersection of gender and ethnicity, against the discourse of institutionalised “othering” and covert discrimination (Jones, A. et al., 2021).

As a middle manager, she is confronted by the discourse of neoliberalism, new managerialism, unmanageable workload and organisational change (the new AEP contract) (Calvert et al., 2011; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Morley, 2013; Sutton, 2015; Winter, 2009).

As a post-heroic, collaborative and empathetic leader (Fletcher, 2004), she is agentic in enabling her team members to develop professionally as teachers and academics while doing identity work in a hybrid role balancing between academic manager and managed academic (Whitchurch, 2008).

RQ2.

While aligning herself with the postfeminist discourse of choice (Gill, 2014), she is empowered by the gendered leadership learning experience and mentoring support of her line manager (Elliot & Stead, 2008). However, her agency is constrained by the lack of self-confidence, the discourse of the organisational hierarchy, the glass ceiling effect and the institutional neglect of middle managers (Williams, 2014).

RQ3.

Her dilemmatic in and out of group identity (Taifel & Turner, 1978; Bamber, 2011) – aspiring to be an academic yet not being fully accepted due to the nature of her role – results in identity regulation, control and emotional labour (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brescoll, 2011; Hochschild, 2012).

4.3.8. Nuria

4.3.8.1. Positioning level one – against the story actors

Story 1. Theme: Anxiety over identity loss against the discourse of immigration

Nuria is a Russian subject leader, educated in one of the regional universities of the Russian Federation, where the Russian language was taught alongside the regional ethnic language.

She starts with an abstract: “I had to work in business and education, did some teaching, and any job I could get hold of – it was in the nineties – very hard times”.

She expands on the start of her career in the orientation: “I was only given part-time teaching jobs at the university. I was asked to teach whatever was not covered by the full-time staff, so I picked up anything that was given to me”. The orientation points to the passive, non-agentive submission to the external political and economic forces – the times were tough, so she did whatever was given to her.

The complicating action comes with the mass migration of the native Russian population from her region due to the geopolitical situations resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian language was losing its status as the dominant language of the region, and the Russian teachers, including herself, were losing their professional identity and job security. She recalls the atmosphere around her at the time:

I understood that soon I may not have a job. The atmosphere was very nervous. Reductions have been announced, and some colleagues had to leave. I started looking for other opportunities abroad, applying for different positions. I even thought that I might have to change my profession, that Russian language teachers would not be required.

The story is resolved with her being offered a scholarship to study and teach at a UK university, where she is now. Her agency develops in the face of adversity, as evidenced by her proactive positioning to avoid professional identity loss.

Story 2. Theme: Identity construction against the discourse of insecurity, pandemic and illness

- Subtheme: Leadership development in adverse circumstances

The orientation sets the scene for the next step in her career – the closure of the Russian section due to a general decline in students learning foreign languages:

All language programmes started to get smaller. So, I started working everywhere – evening, commercial courses, teaching in different places, commuting, teaching to businesspeople, and diplomats. I even opened my own business – teaching Russian to children of heritage speakers in a supplementary school. I had a group of teachers who I managed. It was a very creative job, we organised concerts, it was very interesting.

She positions herself as an agentic figure, initiating progressive career moves and developing leadership skills despite the loss of stable employment, as conveyed by the positive qualifiers – “creative”, “very interesting”.

- Subtheme: Overcoming anxiety and self-doubt over professional identity loss

The complicating action coincides with the external events, making an impact on her professional life – the financial crash and the pandemic. She is confounded by self-doubt and the need to make a living while also battling the physical effects of Covid. She has to reapply for her old job and give up her supplementary school:

I thought things were going well, but then we had a financial crash, and the problems with students began. I had fewer private students and started looking for a more permanent position again. I tried to keep my part-time jobs but found it difficult after Covid.

She is overcome by external (financial crash, pandemic) and internal (illness) factors, resulting in the loss of security and professional self-doubt. The resolution comes with her success in reapplying for her old job, but as a subject leader under a different leadership:

I went for an interview, was very anxious, and they took me on. So, I am now in the same university, but things are different. It was very hard during the Covid period, we had a lot of work. We had a big workload; it was a very anxious time. And a lot of stress. And I was ill with Covid as well. We had to learn new technologies. I was not in good shape. Also, my relatives were very ill, so I had a lot of stress. It was a very stressful period.

While being proactive in seeking employment, she is concerned by the effect that increased workload, technological challenges and her and her relatives' illness have on her physical and mental well-being. This is conveyed by the repeated use of intensifiers “very”, “a lot of” and reiteration of the key words: “workload, stress and anxiety”.

- Subtheme: Identity construction against the discourse of organisational change

The evaluation of her current positioning as a subject leader dwells on the same challenges she experienced during the pandemic: the unmanageable workload and the technological and organisational changes, leading to identity stress: “Covid has gone, but the workload

remains. I don't feel as if I work any less. I don't feel less stressed. You never know what to expect, we had Covid, then the merger of departments. – very traumatic.”

Although she is positioned within her university community as not involved in decision making, she is openly critical of the imposed organisational changes and voices her opinion at the meeting, thus projecting an agentive figure:

I do not believe that the change is as necessary as the management thinks. It all happens above you. Sometimes I have a feeling that they make changes for the sake of change. I remember how I once asked a question at one of our meetings. I was saying – why? What is this for? How are we going to implement this change? Why are we doing it? I don't have this understanding. I did not get the answer.

Her leadership is dilemmatic - she interrogates the management actions and seeks clarity and understanding behind the organisational changes, but she is being silenced at meetings. This is revealed by the reiteration of rhetorical questions – “Why? What for? How?” repetition of negative phrases – “I don't have the understanding”, “I did not get the answer”.

- Subtheme: Critical positioning against the organisational culture and institutional silencing

Her lack of understanding of the changes in the organisation leads to mistrust and non-alignment with the organisational culture, thus weakening her position as a leader, whose voice is not heard.

The management must have its vision. I cannot grasp the scope of this vision; I do not know what is happening above you. And because I do not have this understanding, I have no enthusiasm. We are talking about restructuring, changes in portfolio, assessment, and students' enrolment. I have no say in making these changes, but they will directly affect my work and the number of students we enrol.

Her critical stance against the management results in her partial identity loss – “I have no enthusiasm” - and is signalled by the negative vocabulary choice: “I don't know what is happening above you”, “I have no say”, “I cannot grasp the scope”. The university management is positioned as remote and detached from her as a middle manager. She positions herself as being deprived of agency through institutionalised silencing.

- Subtheme: Concern over the loss of departmental identity due to restructuring

Her concerns are further exacerbated by the recent merging of the IWLP with the language departments. This has led to the loss of her departmental identity. She believes that the section she leads has become an appendage to the bigger language department and that their profiles do not match.

These are two different things, two completely different tasks. The full language degrees are less and less popular, so somehow, we became an appendage to the degree programme. This made us less commercially stable. It feels that because of our marketing and previous experience with student enrolment, we are helping the other department. At the same time, it made us vulnerable, so our enrolment suffers as a result. But nobody explains anything to us, there is no clear picture.

She positions herself critically towards the organisational change, as it impacts her job security. However, being restricted by the lack of knowledge and understanding (“nobody explains”, “there is no clear picture”), she feels disempowered by the discourse of instability (“it made us vulnerable”). While being an outsider within her organisation, she signals her affiliation with her departmental community by the use of the pronouns “we” and “us”.

Thus, although she lacks the agency to resist the organisational change, she positions herself as part of the university community, claiming an in-group identity.

4.3.8.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: Leadership identity construction against the discourses of geopolitical adversity and gender politics

Nuria’s positioning as a subject leader only becomes prominent when specifically questioned by the interviewer. She identifies herself as a post-heroic, collaborative and empathetic leader who values the pedagogy and students’ attainment in her subject above all else.

- Subtheme: Leadership experience through geopolitical context

She seeks solidarity and confides in me about the challenges to the Russian curriculum due to external geopolitical factors. These include the breakdown of academic ties with Russian universities, the need to establish connections with the universities of other Russian speaking countries and the need to maintain students’ motivation of learning the language in the adverse political climate.

She demonstrates agency in developing initiatives for her and her team to change their pedagogical approach to continue to attract students:

We have to do things which we did not have time for before. To make it interesting for the students, by my own initiative, we are organising celebrations for them, different plays. But at the same time, I have a feeling as if work piles up higher and higher.

Another leadership challenge for her is to navigate the political debate among the students who hold opposing political views:

I had to remove some topics from our curriculum – we had real battles with students because they had such different views on politics. I always tell them that we are not dealing with politics, we are dealing with the Russian language. So, we are viewing all events through the cultural prism.

She reports identity work and emotional labour while being challenged by the need to overcome the negative perception of Russia among her students and maintain their enthusiasm.

Everything is different now, three years after they started – they were so inspired. I have to work hard to retain this group and keep up their enthusiasm. I hope we will overcome this barrier of mistrust, this hatred for each other. We need to jump over this barrier.

She compares her pedagogical and leadership task of “overcoming the mistrust and hatred” with the “barrier, which needs to be jumped over”, thus reinforcing the image of an enormous challenge.

She wishes to maintain the status quo in the political debate on Russia:

I am very glad that many people do not have fixed views on the subject – which side is guilty – so there is some kind of grey zone, where there is no right or wrong. So, nothing is black and white. Yes, this is what I can see in intellectual circles. This is noticeable, which is good.

- Subtheme: Identity construction through the intersection of nationality and ethnicity

When asked about any potential conflicts with her colleagues related to her Russian teacher’s identity, her positioning is dilemmatic. On the one hand, she is a Russian national; on the other hand, she is ethnically not Russian, which makes it easier for her to navigate the issue.

I have always said that I am a product of the Soviet times, so I am a little bit different because I was born in a country which does not exist anymore. And when I talk to my

colleagues, they are all from different countries and of different ethnicities – they are very understanding.

Thus, by claiming her ethnicity as part of her national identity, she manages to avoid conflict situations.

- Subtheme: Leadership experience through curriculum decolonising and gender politics

Nuria and I discuss her leadership experience through the context of curriculum decolonising. She specifically points to the university's aim to deconstruct stereotypical representations of gender and introduce ethnic diversity. She positions herself in line with traditional gender roles and values. She is also dismissive of the curriculum agenda as a "fad", protesting the gender politics discourse.

All these gender categories are just fads, we must not blindly follow what is being imposed on you. When fashion trends become policies, this is when I feel my freedom is being restricted. I have always felt it was important for me to have freedom in what I teach. I have always thought how privileged I was to be able to teach things which interest me. And if I am deprived of this opportunity, who knows, maybe I will not work at the university? Because money is important, but this is not the most important thing in life, correct?

Her high value of freedom comes to the fore in opposition to the institutional policies, which she refuses to accept. She is concerned that "fashion trends become policies" to be imposed on the curriculum. She does not share these values and would rather leave the university than have her freedom restricted. Thus, by taking such an assertive stance, she demonstrates the power of the narrative to enhance the speaker's agency through interaction.

4.3.8.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

RQ1.

Nuria positions herself as an accidental leader (Floyd, 2016), who takes on a leadership role as a result of organisational restructuring (Beck & Young, 2005) and against the discourse of financial insecurity, the global pandemic and the lack of employment.

While her agency is restricted by the discourse of illness and organisational change (Winter, 2009; Calvert et al., 2011), she is positioned as critically agentive against the discourse of institutionalised silencing and "othering" (Jones, A., 2021).

RQ2.

Nuria learns to be a collaborative, pedagogically innovative and empathetic leader (Andrews, 2016; Northouse, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2019) while doing identity work in times of organisational and political change (Whitchurch, 2012).

Her leadership experience allows her to take a proactive stance in enhancing the curriculum, but also questioning the university policy of curriculum decolonising as a “fashion fad” (Abu Moghli, 2021).

She voices her disagreement with the organisational values (Rintoul & Goulais, 2010) on the subject of political hatred and gender representation (Morris et al., 2022), claiming a critical agentive positioning.

She also experiences leadership through the intersection between ethnic, national and political identities, taking a balanced stance against the adverse political discourse and asserting her ethnicity as part of her national identity (Dadabaev, 2013).

RQ3.

As a middle manager, Nuria shifts between being an agentive actor and an undergoer while resisting certain organisational values (Rintoul & Goulais, 2010) and asserting herself as an outsider within the organisation, claiming the out-group identity (Taifel & Turner, 1978).

4.3.9. Svetlana

4.3.9.1. Positioning level one – against the story actors

Theme: Leadership identity construction against the discourse of cultural values

- Subtheme: Status and prestige factors in identity construction

In the abstract, Svetlana declares her positioning as an education leader in a prestigious UK university in contrast with a “godforsaken” one:

I don't work in any godforsaken former Polytechnique. My position is unusual – I am sitting on two chairs – I coordinate Russian as part of IWLP and have a position in the Slavic department. This is rare. I had worked at the Slavic department for a long time without a proper contract, as an hourly paid teacher. I have received the permanent contract only with the IWLP.

She uses the colloquial “god forsaken former Polytechnique” pejoratively to contrast with her “rare” role and to highlight her elevated professional status. At the same time, the mention

of the contractual differences in her role – hourly paid versus permanent – reveals a certain level of job insecurity. Thus, she displays a dilemmatic identity, claiming prestige and role insecurity/hybridity (sitting on two chairs) at the same time.

- Subtheme: Glass ceiling effect of academic exclusion on the grounds of gender, age and nationality

Although proud of her achievements – “I have reached the top of my position”, despite the long years of service, she “cannot go any further” and does not feel that she “belongs to the club”:

We have an old boys’ network. Only rarely do people who do not belong to the club reach top positions. Those who do, normally come from other Anglo-Saxon communities, mostly from the USA. Although there is no glass ceiling on paper. If I were younger and more ambitious, this would have been difficult – too much bureaucracy, too many forms to fill in, too much beating the drum and blowing your own trumpet and telling everyone how wonderful you are.

Thus, she positions herself as an outsider within the community, claiming an out-of-group national identity, not being of Anglo-Saxon origin. Although there is no “glass ceiling on paper” or in theory, she has nevertheless encountered it in practice, being constrained by her age and perceived lack of ambition. The use of metaphors “beating the drum” and “blowing the trumpet” reinforces her positioning as non-agentive against the discourse of organisational culture.

- Subtheme: Identity work against the discourse of geopolitical hostilities

The complicating action falls on the most significant event in her career related to the war in Ukraine and the change in political climate:

Since 2022, our lives have changed radically; we have become the teachers of the language of an aggressor. There are three of us, and our task is very, very difficult. On paper, there is no cancelled culture, but I can honestly say that where I work, Russian culture is being cancelled. There is also a ban on any educational initiatives because the university cut off all ties with Russian colleagues from all universities in the Russian Federation, which did not denounce the war. As one Russian author said, the Russian language and culture do not belong to Putin. What happened then does not diminish the achievements of Russian culture, which are well known. This had an impact on our activities – we had conferences and seminars, but now everything died out.

She constructs an in-group professional identity by using the collective “we”, “the teachers of the language of an aggressor”, “the three of us”, claiming the labels assigned to her and her colleagues as part of critical positioning by the university. She is dilemmatic in her positioning – remaining part of the organisation yet not upholding the organisational values – “Where I work, Russian culture is being cancelled”. Her identity regulation is conveyed as “very, very difficult”.

- Subtheme: Agency constrained by the lack of academic freedom

Her academic, teaching and leadership identities are overpowered by the lack of academic freedom, students’ motivation, teaching resources and the hostile working environment:

When the 22/23 academic year started, I felt physically drained and tormented about teaching. I did not know what to say. I wanted to ask them – Why are you here? I struggled with getting access to materials, most sites were blocked. It was very hard because the general “party line” of my university is “Russian is rubbish” and we can only accept anything starting with an “r” under the sauce of the imperialist past, which needs to be disposed of.

Her emotional labour and identity struggle are revealed by the use of key words “tormented”, “drained”, “very hard”. The reference to the “party line” implies her critical stance against the university’s authoritarian ideology, reinforced by the metaphorical use of “sauce” in relation to the “imperialist past” for ironic effect.

- Subtheme: Critical positioning towards university radicalisation and academic silencing

To further exemplify what she calls the “radicalisation” of the university policy towards Russia, she tells a story of a senior and well-respected colleague:

He was well regarded in both Russia and the UK, as his area of expertise was unique and his research well-publicised. He loved Russia with all his heart. He was invited to read a series of open lectures to mark his retirement. But every time he started to speak, the audience began to boo him. The most horrible thing was that even those who considered this behaviour abhorrent and inappropriate were sitting with their mouths shut and did not utter a word. It was painful and absurd.

The audience is positioned in two distinct ways: aggressive – those who “booed” the professor, and passive – those who kept silent and allowed the booing. Her criticism of both is conveyed by the use of emotive adjectives – “abhorrent”, “painful”, “absurd”.

The story's resolution is slightly optimistic – she is encouraged by the fact that, unlike the rest of the university, the IWLP is not so radicalised, causing her less stress and identity regulation.

4.3.9.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme – Leadership experience through curriculum review

- Subtheme: Critical positioning towards curriculum changes and non-alignment with university values

I interrogate Svetlana's positioning further with regard to her leadership in Russian curriculum change. She is dismissive of the university policy of curriculum decolonising and views it as a "fad", another restriction of academic freedom.

We had the whole series of...What was it called? I want to say demilitarisation, no! Decolonisation. Yes, exactly, decolonisation of Slavic studies. Nobody knows what it is. But it sounds like a fad, being promoted on all platforms. I stopped participating in those seminars. I even unsubscribed from all their newsletters. I feel as if I am forced to endure penance for something I have not done. I found it rather tiring to wear this guilty face at all times. And this is particularly hard here in the Anglo-Saxon world. My colleagues teaching Russian in France do not feel the same pressure. They do not have this overwhelming urge to divide everything into black and white, good and bad, and point fingers at those who need to be condemned.

By deliberately misremembering the term, claiming it to be a "fad" and "nobody knows what it is", and stopping attending the seminars, she unsubscribes from the university values, thus taking a critical, agentic stance against it. However, the keywords "penance", "guilty face", "tiring", "pressure", and "condemn" suggest that she experiences identity struggle while resisting the ideology of extreme categorisation.

4.3.9.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

RQ1.

Svetlana positions herself as a post-heroic, pedagogically ethical leader (Andrews, 2016; Northouse, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2019), whose agency is restricted by external factors – geopolitics and institutional policies.

RQ2.

Her leadership experience allows her to take a critical stance against the institutional policy on cancelling Russian culture (Norris, 2023; Melnikova & Vasilyeva, 2024), the discourse of institutionalised silencing and “othering” of Russian colleagues (Jones, A. et al., 2021) and curriculum decolonising policy (Abu Moghli, 2021; Kamusella, 2024).

RQ3.

In the course of interaction, Svetlana takes an agentive stance against the discourse of university radicalisation in times of political change (Whitchurch, 2012), resisting the university’s values and ideology (Rintoul & Goulais, 2010) and claiming the out-group identity (Taifel & Turner, 1978).

4.3.10. Basma

4.2.10.1. Positioning level one – against the story actors

Story 1. Theme: Leadership identity construction against the discourse of immigration, motherhood

- Subtheme: Leadership learning from notable people and training

Basma reflects on her leadership development, evaluating her recent Aurora leadership training and how relatable this experience was for her:

It was really good. The speaker was telling us about herself, how she started and what made her a better leader, (.) and my fears were going out the window because I was so impressed. She was talking about, (.) how the past made her a good leader, her mistakes or her hardships in the past.

The female speaker is positioned as a notable person whose gender and gendered experience are relevant to Basma’s leadership learning. The repeated use of the intensifier “really” and the metaphor “my fears are going out the window” enhances her positive and empowering experience. It also triggers her childhood memory of how she developed her confidence:

My dad would always sit me next to him and ask me for guidance, for my opinion. It's not because I was authoritative, but because he loved me to the extent that he confided in me. So, I grew up in a place where I felt confident.

- Subtheme: Professional identity construction against the patriarchal gendered discourse

Having graduated with a degree in architecture, she could not work in this profession, and teaching was the only choice to fit in with childcare when she moved to the UK:

When we moved to this country, straight away I started having children. You know, after we got married (.) men were the world at that time. Men are the architects; it wasn't that easy for a woman to do this career. So, I had to do something which would fit with my children.

She invokes the gender difference discourse through the intersection of immigration and motherhood. On the one hand, her agency has been constrained by the gendered cultural discourse of the Middle East (Afiouni, 2014). On the one hand, she is empowered by the confidence given to her by her family. Her narrative invokes traditional gender ideology discourse with roles assigned to a woman as a homemaker and caregiver, and to a man as “the architect” (Keddie, 2012).

- Subtheme: agentic positioning against immigration and unfair employment discourse

Her professional identity is also constrained by the discourse of immigration. Having completed her teacher training, she got a job at a university, while still feeling out of her depth linguistically and culturally.

My English wasn't that good at this time. This was a big challenge. But I tried my best, going back to the dictionary to look for the words I didn't understand at meetings. It was hard, but then I became a teacher. I had very good feedback from my students. I always spent a long time preparing for my classes.

Despite the challenges, she is keen on her development and professional learning - “going back to the dictionary”, “spending a long time preparing for my classes”, and is proud of her achievements – “I had very good feedback”.

The complicating action comes with the realisation that she was doing a full-time job while employed on a 0.5 fractional contract: “I think the worst challenge was when you feel it's not fair. When you feel it's not fair, you don't really progress.” The repetition of “it is not fair” reinforces her frustration and critical positioning against the university management.

- Subtheme: Collaborative leadership identity constrained by the discourse of uncertainty and career limitations

However, she does not let the feeling overwhelm her and takes a proactive leadership role in her team, winning approval from the senior management: “And this is when I started doing better. I started helping others with their teaching, creating resources, using technology, following good practice, peer observation and training.” The resolution comes with her successfully applying for the coordinator’s position: “I put all the things that I’ve done in the application, and my line manager supported me”.

Basma evaluates her leadership success in terms of the added financial value that she and her team bring to the university, as the measurement of her achievement: “We aim to bring more income to the university. So, we try to spread the word, go to the media, organise events, courses. And we are good at it”. She positions herself as a collaborative, post-heroic leader, projecting an in-group identity as indexed by the use of “we” and attributing success to the team.

However, the coda reveals her concerns and uncertainty about her career progression:

I think that I can do well coordinating, teaching and learning. I can see myself as good at mentoring. But what, where and how? This is a bit cloudy. It's not clear to me yet. Especially at the language centre, we can't grow here at the language centre.

She reports identity regulation due to promotional and developmental constraints imposed by the language centre, which delivers IWLP courses. Her agentive and aspirational identity claim is conveyed linguistically through the anaphoric repetition – “I can see myself good at it”. However, she is overpowered by the lack of prospects, revealed by rhetorical questioning “What, where and how?” and the key words of uncertainty – “cloudy”, “not clear”, “we can’t grow”, displaying the dilemmatic identity work.

Story 2. Theme: leadership identity construction through leadership learning

- Subtheme: Leadership identity challenged by self-doubt and imposter syndrome

The narrative moves to leadership challenges. The abstract below states her main professional challenge:

The main challenge I deal with is the teachers. I was one of them, I was a teacher like them. So, there is some jealousy. Maybe they felt that this role should have been given to them, maybe they have more qualifications than me.

Basma's positioning is dilemmatic – wishing to stay part of the group – “I was one of them” and yet being an outsider – a coordinator. Her leadership confidence is challenged by the perceived jealousy from her colleagues. She also experiences self-doubt about her professional qualifications, “maybe they have more qualifications than me”. Her self-doubt leads to identity regulation due to “imposter syndrome” (Leick & Köstner, 2024; Ramos et al., 2021; Senior, 2020) and the tension between perceived and prescribed identities (Billot, 2010; Winter, 2009).

- Subtheme: Leadership learning against the discourse of ageism

Basma also experiences leadership through the intersection of culture and age:

Another challenge is our senior colleagues, some of them are 70, 80 years old. There is pressure on me to know how to deal with them. My role is to observe classes and make sure everything is going well, make sure that they are performing well in their classes.

She sets the story scene in the orientation using negatively charged words “pressure”, “challenge” and admitting her leadership struggle. The complicating action results in a conflict situation:

Once, I had an experience with a teacher. I sent them an email after my observation. I mentioned many good things, but also what they can improve. So, he sent me a photo of his blood pressure. It is really sensitive when you have someone of a certain age, and they are trying their best. They make mistakes, but they do not want anyone to tell them anything. So yeah, that was one of the challenges.

She positions her older colleague as someone who reacts inappropriately towards critical feedback and makes mistakes; however, her repeated reference to the colleague's age implies that Basma's perception of old age is a competence failure.

- Leadership learning against the discourse of cultural gendered stereotyping

Apart from the discourse of agism, she also invokes a gendered leadership discourse to describe what she perceives as traditional Middle Eastern male-dominated culture in her team:

This happened with two male teachers. They can't take anything from a woman. But I don't want to assume this, I just feel it. I have this feeling because they are male. It's not because they want to assert their authority, but they feel upset when a woman

talks to them in a certain way or gives them some tasks to do. So, they feel uncomfortable with that. I don't know if it's something to do with our Middle Eastern culture.

The story sheds light on leadership development through situated learning (Kempster & Stewart, 2010) and gendered discourse. She is reluctant to label her experience explicitly as sexism-in-action – “they can’t take anything from a woman”, “they feel upset when a woman talks to them in a certain way or gives them tasks” but instead uses parenthetical repetition of “I feel”, downgrading her experience of sexism in the workplace (Jones & Clifton, 2018). However, the story highlights her identity work against the discourse of gender dominance (Coates, 2013) and cultural gendered stereotyping on the grounds of her ethnic and gendered identity (Shouwunmi et al., 2019).

The resolution reveals the lesson she learnt and applied to her leadership development: “I learned the lesson that it's better to speak than send an e-mail because the way you read it in an e-mail is different from when you hear it. So, I try to talk to the teachers.” Thus, the story illuminates Basma’s acquisition of self-knowledge and the constructing of an authentic leadership identity (Shamir & Eilam, 2005) against adverse conflict situations.

Story 3. Theme: Academic identity construction against the discourse of motherhood and misogyny

- Subtheme: Juggling motherhood and academic aspirations

The gendered discourse of motherhood in academia comes into focus through the intersection between personal and professional aspects of her career development.

The abstract outlines her current positioning as a proud mother of five children, who have grown up to be successful professionals: “One is a manager; the other one is a physics teacher; the third one is a lead radiographer, the fourth one is a pharmacist, the last one is still studying.”

This contrasts with the orientation, describing the challenges she experienced when writing a book while the children were small:

It was tough when they were young, but at the same time, it was rewarding. (.) When a child wakes up at night, it was the time when I was writing my book. So, I wake up, feed them, then I start working at midnight. Sometimes until 2, 3, or 4 in the morning. I enjoyed it. I did not find it stressful. I liked it because I thought I was doing

something good. But the fact that what was written did not reach many people, that hurt.

Although she evaluates the experience as “tough”, she finds it “rewarding” too, as she combined motherhood with writing a textbook, taking a positive stance as an academic “doing something good”. However, the experience is problematised by the outcome, causing her identity stress “that hurt” – her academic work did not reach the intended audience:

I started writing, I got the funding for that, but unfortunately, there was no support. I was thinking, I was going to work with the team. You know, you can't write a book by yourself. You need support from the university. (.) There was no support.

In the complicating action, she positions herself as an emerging scholar whose agency is downgraded by low self-confidence and a lack of support. The repetition of “there was no support”, “you can't write a book by yourself” reveals the extent of her identity regulation.

- Subtheme: Academic identity construction against the discourse of coloniality, ethnicity, gender and academic exclusion

The interference of the antagonist – a colleague from the language department – was instrumental in cancelling the project and withdrawing the funding:

One of the lecturers from the language department. He was English, he had a PhD in Arabic, and he reviewed the book and said “no”. But it was done behind my back, not in front of me. I thought I could improve on what I had written. But the decision was made without consulting me, and they decided not to go with the book.

She is positioned as an outsider, deprived of agency as evidenced by the choice of lexis: “behind my back”, “not in front of me”, “without consulting”. Her academic competence is also downgraded by the antagonist's elevated academic status – a lecturer with a PhD from the language department.

The story brings to the surface several problematic issues – the colonial legacy of Arabic textbook writing by the non-Arabic authors; the centrism of English in academia, the intellectual elitism and academic exclusion and the perceived rivalry between IWLPs and language departments. Basma's apt description of the antagonist as male, English, with a PhD and from the language department brings her frustration into a sharper focus. Although not explicitly, she makes an implicit claim of being marginalised on the grounds of her educational and perceived intellectual inferiority, her language, ethnicity and gender (Columbu, 2022; Moncrieffe, 2020; Kaseem, 2024).

Story 4. Theme: Identity construction through the discourse of sexism and intellectual elitism

The discourse of sexism and intellectual elitism is invoked through another story, in which the male antagonist is also English with a PhD and was responsible for training and development. Basma describes him as “very knowledgeable” and at the same time “highly critical” of the female teachers, who were on the training course with her:

Most of the teachers were mums. They had lots of responsibilities, and he always told us to read these six books, about 1000 pages long. He was treating us like, you know, we were stupid. But don't expect a woman who is taking care of kids, waking up in the middle of the night, and feeding them. You don't expect her to have read the same number of books. And this was one of the things that I did not like.

The story's orientation positions her as critical and, at the same time, agentic within the discourse of gendered intellectual elitism. While accepting her educational limitation due to caring responsibilities, “You don't expect a woman to have read the same number of books”, she objects to being undermined professionally by a male colleague, who downgrades her intellectual status: “This was one of the things that I did not like because he was treating us like we were stupid.” By using the collective “we” pronoun, she also claims solidarity with other women in her position, constructing her academic identity against the discourse of gendered and educational inequality. She experiences a double burden – the pressure of wanting to be good at both being a mum and an academic (Morley, 2013, 2014).

The complicating action positions Basma as an agentic figure who finds a creative way to make a stance against misogyny:

I am a poet, so I wrote a poem “against” him. And I read it in front of the teachers, and they all clapped; they were very happy. I think maybe at that time he also laughed, and he clapped like them, but he did not like it. So, I told him what I thought, but in a poem, a classical poem, a nice poem. I did that.

Basma aligns herself with a postfeminist discourse of choice, in contrast with her male antagonist's overt criticism towards her and her female colleagues; she acts creatively and covertly. However, her poem “against him” achieves the desired effect – the humour and laughter hurt him - “he laughed, and he clapped, but he did not like it”. The story illuminates Basma's leadership experience, in which she builds a strong in-group identity and solidarity, acting on behalf of the group of female teachers with professional and caring responsibilities.

The narrative brings to the fore the discourse of sexism in academia, obscured by the postfeminist discourse of choice. Basma chooses to perform a creative academic identity while undergoing agency limitation through a masculine, sexist discourse of intellectual dominance (Lewis et al., 2017; Gill, 2008).

The evaluation brings us back to her unfulfilled academic ambition: despite the lack of support, she completed the book. However, it is not being used by the university, leaving her disempowered and unfulfilled: “Something is missing. I feel I can do more, but without support, this part of my life is missing”.

As a middle manager, who does not have a contractual obligation to do scholarship activities, she is positioned as a third space academic (Whitchurch, 2012), whose identity is regulated by wishing to progress academically yet being restricted by the lack of support.

4.3.10.2. Positioning level two – the here-and-now of interaction

Theme: In-group/out-group identity construction in a competitive organisational context

In relation to the interviewer, Basma positions herself as an empathetic and collaborative interlocutor. As we both work in similar institutional structures, she confides in me about the competitive relationship between the IWLP and the language department:

The department is not working well with the IWLP. They do not welcome us; they always see us as competitors. They concentrate on grammar and reading. But their students are not good at speaking. So that's why, when we have our open days, when we have our tasters, we always see the competition. And even once on the open day, they were standing in front of our display, hiding us.

She performs an in-group identity with the IWLP and the out-of-group with the language department in the “us-versus-them” opposition. She aligns herself with the culture of her organisation, claiming educational and marketing success, in opposition to the perceived pedagogical and commercial failure of the language department. Basma positions the language department as a rival who does not wish to collaborate with IWLP at an organisational level, “they are not working with us,” and the physical level, “they were standing in front of our display, hiding us”.

4.3.10.3. Positioning level three – against societal discourses and research questions

RQ1.

Basma constructs her professional identity through the intersection of gender, immigration, motherhood, and leadership learning discourses.

She constructs her leadership identity through situated leadership learning (Kempster & Stewart, 2010), against ageism (Redman & Snape, 2002) and “imposter syndrome” discourse (Leick & Köstner, 2024; Ramos et al., 2021; Senior, 2020), experiencing tension between perceived and prescribed identities (Billot, 2010; Winter, 2009).

As an emergent, post-heroic leader (Kempster, 2006), she experiences identity regulation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002) due to the discourse of uncertainty and the glass ceiling (Williams, 2014) restricting her agency.

RQ2.

She aligns herself with the postfeminist neoliberal discourse of choice (Gill, 2014), empowered by the gendered leadership learning experience through Aurora training. At the same time, her professional identity is constrained by the traditional patriarchal discourse of gender ideology (Keddie, 2012; Afiouni, 2014) and immigration.

She develops authentic leadership qualities (Shamir & Eilam, 2005) by being agentive against the discourse of sexism-in-action (Jones & Clifton, 2017) and cultural gendered stereotyping (Shouwunmi et al., 2019).

RQ3.

Basma’s academic identity is fragmented and dilemmatic – her agency is constrained by the discourse of motherhood in academia (Cotterill & Letherby, 2005), coloniality and silencing (Columbu, 2022; Moncrieffe, 2020; Kaseem, 2024), gender dominance (Sunderland, 2004; Coates, 2013) and academic misogyny (Sharp & Messuri, 2023; Morley, 2011).

At the same time, by aligning herself with the postfeminist and neoliberal discourse of choice (Gill, 2008), she makes an identity shift from dilemmatic to agentive, performing success through creativity against the masculine, sexist discourse of intellectual dominance (Lewis et al., 2017; Gill, 2008).

4.4. Conclusion

The analysis has revealed similarities and differences in the women's positioning due to their professional and educational backgrounds, career expectations and cultural perceptions related to gendered, national and ethnic identities. They perform identity work against a variety of discourses, which are relevant for some and insignificant for others. The comparison in their positioning is presented in the discussion chapter.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Using a feminist poststructuralist framework, this study has explored the leadership experience of ten female middle managers of Arabic and Russian origin in the context of IWLP. Using a multiple case study approach and narrative inquiry methodology, I applied a combined approach to thematic, positioning and narrative analysis of the dilemmatic identity to generate rich data and uncover the participants' identity work. The study addresses the gap in the literature on dilemmatic gendered leadership identity construction in the UK higher education sector. In doing so, this thesis aims to understand the complexities of women's leadership learning through the intersection of personal and professional.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results and link them with the relevant literature and theories outlined in Chapter 2. I will summarise the findings and draw connections to the previous empirical studies. I will also build upon the insights from the theories and concepts which frame my study to emphasise the significance of the data and the transferability of results. The discussion will also highlight new findings that have implications for future research. Finally, I will further reflect on my positionality.

To further discuss the findings, I will explore the commonalities and differences in the way women shape their leadership identities. While each of the ten cases is unique, there are common themes and discourses which bind them together. The discussion is segmented into three sections, each addressing one of the research questions. Within these sections, I have identified the societal discourses within which the participants construct their leadership identities.

5.2. RQ1. HOW IS FEMALE LEADERSHIP IDENTITY CONSTRUCTED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INSTITUTION-WIDE LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES OF UK UNIVERSITIES?

The analysis reveals that all participants construct their identities through storytelling and interactive positioning against a range of discourses in the context of IWLPs. Their narratives reveal many similarities, but also nuanced differences in positioning against these discourses, resulting in identity work. Most participants construct their professional identities through the intersection of the discourses, which emerged from the analysis and are presented in

Figure 5.1. The next sections will summarise how these discourses interact with identity work.

Figure 5.1. Societal discourses emerged from positioning analysis

☐	gender	☐
☐	immigration	☐
☐	status	☐
☐	ethnicity	☐
☐	culture	☐
☐	sexism	☐
☐	motherhood in academia	☐
☐	exclusion	☐
☐	othering	☐
☐	leadership learning	☐
☐	"glass ceiling"	☐
☐	new managerialism	☐
☐	governmentality	☐
☐	pandemic	☐
☐	political adversity	☐
☐	decolonisation	☐
☐	discrimination	☐
☐	postfeminism	☐
☐	organisational change	☐
☐	neoliberalism	☐
☐	ageism	☐
☐	anti-establishment	☐
☐	intersectionality	☐
☐	inequality	☐
☐	institutional neglect	☐
☐	marginalisation	☐

5.2.1. LEADERSHIP IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH THE INTERSECTION OF IMMIGRATION, ACADEMIC STATUS, GENDER, ETHNICITY, LANGUAGE AND AGE

The study's findings on the intersectional nature of leadership identity construction are consistent with the Feminist poststructuralist theory of existing societal power imbalance and marginalisation concerning gender, race, class, ethnicity and other identity aspects supported by the literature (Blackmore, 2013; Gill, 2016; Showunmi, 2022; Weedon, 2006).

Mona, Nina, Margarita, Nuria, Aadab and Basma construct their leadership identities against the discourse of immigration. Within this context, Nina, Margarita and Basma also experience imposter syndrome (Leick & Köstner, 2024; Ramos & Wright-Mair, 2021), leading to identity regulation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002) and tension between perceived and prescribed identities (Billot, 2010; Winter, 2009). Closely linked to the discourse of immigration is the discourse of academic elitism and intellectual power hegemony (Evans, 2015), leading to non-native speakers of English being marginalised (O'Regan, 2021). Academic elitism becomes visible through the invocation of the sexist discourse of intellectual dominance (Lewis et al., 2017; Gill et al., 2016), resulting in identity loss (Le Gallais, 2009; Hanson, 2009) and covert discrimination on the grounds of gender and academic status (Ayala-López, 2018; Kebabi, 2024; Jones, A. et al., 2021), as revealed by Aadab, Margarita, Jaleela and Basma.

The interplay between immigration, academic status and gender also involves ethnicity. Mona, Aadab, Margarita, Jaleela, Svetlana and Basma position themselves agentively against the discourse of institutionalised "othering" and covert ethnic discrimination (Jones, A. et al., 2021). The discourse of academic exclusion is made explicit by Aadab, Margarita, Svetlana and Jaleela, who reference not being part of the club, the old boys' network and being outsiders within a hierarchy with no space for them.

Within this context, Aadab also reports gender and cultural tokenism, "box-ticking" and covert institutional discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender and language (Arday, 2018; Coleman et al., 2023; Faheem & Rahman, 2024; Heslop-Martin, 2024; Weekes et al., 2024). Margarita, Mila and Basma also encounter the discourse of ageism in their leadership practice (Redman & Snape, 2002). However, there is a significant difference in their positioning. Margarita positions herself agentively against being discriminated against on the grounds of her young age. At the same time, Mila and Basma exhibit ageism in relation to their team members and experience leadership struggles and emotional labour. Thus, these

narratives invoke the discourse of inequality through the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, academic status, immigration, language and age (Davies et al., 2006).

These findings confirm similar empirical studies on identity construction against the discourse of academic elitism and neoliberal performativity (Evans, 2015), privileging English native over non-native scholars by peer reviewers (Brutt-Griffler, 2008; Horn, 2017). The studies of sexist discourse in the work settings, obscured by post-feminism (Gill et al., 2016; Jones & Clifton, 2018) and neoliberal performativity of choice through the intersection of gender and class (Sørensen, 2017), also confirm my results.

The data from autoethnographic studies of imposter syndrome because of oppression by the neoliberal university system also validates my findings (Ramos & Wright-Mair, 2021; Breeze, 2018; Wilkinson, 2020). Othering and exclusion as institutionalised practices in Australian universities have produced similar results (Jones, A. et al., 2021). Eurocentric intellectual colonisation practices and marginalisation of ethnic minority academics have been observed in the case study in a UK university, confirming my research (Tamimi et al., 2024). However, other studies of professional identity through the intersection of ethnicity and gender reveal reverse gender bias and positive development for women of migrant origin (Jacobs et al., 2022).

To conclude, the narratives substantiate the feminist poststructuralist claims that women are confronted by the discourse of inequality through the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, academic status, immigration, language and age (Davies et al., 2006). However, the study also pointed to the difference in women's positioning ranging from agentive to powerless in relation to institutional discrimination, gender, cultural tokenism and sexism. This highlights the significance of an individualised, nuanced and culturally specific approach to narrative identity construction, which can be achieved through a feminist poststructuralist lens.

5.2.2. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF MIDDLE EASTERN AND RUSSIAN CULTURAL AND GENDERED DISCOURSE

The findings in this section reflect the claims of research into women in leadership positions constrained by societal norms and perceptions and traditional gender ideology permeating Russian and Arabic cultures, as reviewed in Chapter 2 (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Ashwin, 2000; Cotter et al., 2001; Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2017; Tariq & Syed, 2017; Ramadan, 2022; Zherebkina, 2003). However, the results of this study fill the gap in research on how

the Arabic and Russian cultural societal expectations interact with leadership development in the UK university context.

All Arabic-speaking leaders experience leadership in the context of Middle Eastern cultural and gender discourse (Gramsci et al., 1971; Afiouni, 2014). Some feel empowered by this discourse. For example, Mona's leadership development through the intersection of culture and ethnicity makes her a culturally sensitive and ethically responsible leader (Northouse, 2015). Jaleela is also positioned as a culturally astute leader who adapts her leadership style to the cultural context of her team.

Some develop leadership in opposition to the discourse of gender dominance (Sunderland, 2004) by performing emancipatory leadership roles, as in the case of Faizah, who rebels against the constraints of her patriarchal upbringing and marriage. She aligns with the postfeminist discourse of choice (Gill, 2014), expressing pride in her newly acquired leadership status. Her emerging agency empowers her to push cultural gender boundaries and develop autonomy and independence against the discourse of misogyny (Koburtay & Abuhussein, 2021).

Others are constrained by the traditional patriarchal discourse of gender ideology (Afiouni, 2014; Keddie, 2012) and experience sexism through cultural gendered stereotyping on the grounds of their ethnic and gendered identity (Shouwunmi et al., 2019). The example of Basma's interaction with her male team members of Middle Eastern origin, who refuse to be led by a woman, reveals her identity work in countering the discourse of sexism (Savigny, 2014).

Some Russian-speaking leaders develop leadership against the discourse of gender inequality (De Welde & Stepnick, 2023), obscured by the neoliberal discourse of choice (Jones & Floyd, 2024). While aligning with the postfeminist discourse of difference (Gill, 2014), Nina is mentally constrained by the traditional cultural gendered discourse of second shifting (Hochschild & Machung, 2012): performing the role stereotypically assigned to her by society in addition to her professional role due to being a lower earner in the family. Thus, her alignment is contradictory – on the one hand, she claims privileged positioning to be able to enact multiple identities of being a mother, a wife, an academic, a teacher and an educational leader, yet on the other hand, she is constrained by the gender difference discourse (Litosseliti, 2014).

However, all participants develop authentic leadership (Shamir & Eilam, 2005) by being agentive against the discourse of gender dominance (Coates, 2013) and cultural gendered stereotyping (Sowunmi et al., 2019).

The narratives of TED talks by female leaders negotiating the relationship between patriarchal gender order and traditional gender roles while confronting discriminatory practices at work reaffirm these findings (Schnurr, 2022). The empirical feminist study of female Russian-speaking academics negotiating work/life balance after migration to the UK and Germany, constructing the post-Soviet superwoman identity, also confirms the findings of this thesis (Antoshchuk & Gewinner, 2020). Other studies of sexism-in-action being ignored by women due to their postfeminist stance also reveal findings similar to my research (Clifton & Jones, 2018).

By applying social role (Eagly & Wood, 2012) and critical race theories in education (Amiot et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2012) to leadership development in the previously unexplored context of a UK university, the study sheds light on how women agentively overcome the constraints of gendered stereotyping, misogyny and gender dominance. Following Morley's (2014) call for inspiring diversity in educational leadership, the findings of this study confirm the need for further research into the interaction between cultural and racial societal perceptions and leadership aspirations of the underrepresented minorities in UK universities.

5.2.3. LEADERSHIP IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AGAINST THE DISCOURSE OF MOTHERHOOD IN ACADEMIA

The findings of this study confirm that one of the key problematic areas of leadership for women in academia is career limitation due to conflicting demands placed upon women through the intersection of personal and professional discourse.

Motherhood in academia discourse has been instrumental for the participants' identity construction. Although Nina claims privileged access to academic and financial capital due to being able to pursue scholarship activities in her spare time, she takes a critical stance against the organisation exploiting women on fractional contracts who are handling unmanageable workloads (Morley, 2013, 2014). Nina's frustration at the promotional barriers due to her childcare responsibilities is aptly conveyed by the "cut wings" metaphor. She also makes a claim against the postfeminist discourse of difference (Lewis, 2014) and autonomy (Gill, 2014) by admitting women's higher vulnerability than men's due to multiple responsibilities.

Faizah had no choice but to return to full-time work after two months of maternity leave for fear of losing her job. Although she is assertive in her claim of handling the double burden (Cotterill & Letherby, 2005) of motherhood and academia well, referring to herself as a fighter, she doubts she would do it again, making a generational reference (Favero & Heath, 2012).

Although of a different generation, Margarita experiences a similar inflexible workload allocation. Returning from maternity leave, she feels overburdened by her position between two greedy organisations – family and university (Jones & Floyd, 2024; Morley, 2013, 2014). Just like Nina, Margarita's stress manifests itself physically and mentally, forcing her to seek help.

At the same time, Basma, who also encounters motherhood in academia discourse, finds a way to counter it by performing solidarity with other women on her training course, making a claim against academic misogyny (Morley, 2011; Sharp & Messuri, 2023). Similarly to Faizah, she counteracts the discourse of motherhood by claiming to be a fighter and writing a textbook at night between feeding children. However, unlike Faizah's, hers is not a story of academic success – without peer support, her agency is downgraded and the book rejected, knocking her confidence and causing identity stress. Thus, although Nina, Faizah, Margarita and Basma are impacted by motherhood in academia discourse, they encounter it differently: some making agentic claims against it and some submitting to the constraints of this discourse and experiencing identity stress and regulation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002).

The large-scale study of female academics on maternity leave who are forced to maintain academic productivity within the neoliberal university discourse echoes my investigation of women in academia (Jones & Floyd, 2024). My findings also confirm the research based on interviews with manager-academics from 16 UK universities who are disadvantaged in career progression due to their gender and motherhood (Deem, 2003). Another empirical study revealing that senior leadership positions are incompatible with caring responsibilities (Grummell et al., 2008) also resonates with the results of this investigation.

The data from this study contributes to feminist poststructuralist theory of leadership by offering valuable insights into the different ways women confront motherhood in academia discourse through solidarity and creativity. At the same time, they experience a high level of identity stress and regulation as a result of being caught between the discourses of

motherhood and leadership. These findings point to further research into power relations and gendered practice in UK universities within culturally specific contexts.

5.2.4. IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH LEADERSHIP LEARNING

As outlined in the literature review, women learn leadership through a combination of training, mentorship and experience, while performing femininity (Elliot & Stead, 2008), emerging as change agents (Harris & Jones, 2019) and at the same time experiencing role incongruity and backlash for displaying power (Brescoll, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002). The findings of this study reflect these claims but also reveal the key problem the participants experience due to the lack of managerial support.

The women share their leadership learning experiences as mostly positive and gendered. Some feel empowered through formal Aurora training and mentorship for female leaders. Jaleela claims to have benefited from the programme, which gave her confidence. However, she is also critical of the half measures of this training; there is no support for her long-term objectives. At the same time, Basma found the training inspirational and could relate to the female speaker as a notable person, whose gender and gendered experience were relevant to Basma's leadership learning.

Other women learn leadership through professional scaffolding – continuous professional development (CPD), feedback, observations and performing a different, imaginary identity, as in Mona's case. Meanwhile, Aadab admits to learning leadership through self-knowledge (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), rather than formal CPD. For some, learning from notable people (Kempster, 2006) and learning to trust, delegate and collaborate during a critical period in their careers made their leadership experience distributed and gendered (Fletcher, 2004; Northouse, 2020). The empirical study of educational leadership learning through critical incident and gendered discourse aligns with these findings (Acker, 2012).

Nina wishes to be different, learning leadership against the discourse of anti-establishment (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020), and stereotypical positive and negative female leadership role models, such as female academics constrained by traditional patriarchal gender discourse in post-Soviet Russia (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2017). Meanwhile, Mila is assigned a leadership role as the most competent teacher in the team, learning leadership against the discourse of pedagogical incompetence. Both women, however, are reluctant leaders and never learn post-heroic, distributed and collaborative leadership, lacking managerial support, training and experience.

Despite citing the lack of guidance and mentoring in gaining leadership experience, Margarita learns a post-heroic leadership style through solidarity and collaboration with her colleagues, leading a campaign for fair employment. She develops agency through situated learning (Kempster & Stewart, 2010) against the discourse of age and gender discrimination (Redman & Snape, 2002). Aadab, Mona and Faizah have learned to lead by building relationships with their teams, developing trust and good faith. They become empathetic and feminine post-heroic leaders (Fletcher, 2004; Northouse, 2020), empowered by the gendered and authentic leadership learning (Elliot & Stead, 2008).

Despite lacking managerial support for their own development, Aadab and Jaleela are proactive in training their team members in technology and mentoring their scholarship activities. Jaleela feels proud of organising the academic writing retreat for her team. Thus, most women learn to lead by influencing others to achieve pedagogic excellence (Andrews, 2016; Northouse, 2020; Harris & Jones, 2019).

The findings suggest that although investments into leadership training programmes, such as Aurora, are worthwhile and generally met with a positive response, as evidenced by the literature (Debebe et al., 2016; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014, 2016; White, 2003), they do not go far enough. Further mentorship is needed to support individual women in their long-term leadership objectives (de Vries, 2011; de Vries et al., 2006; Doherty and Manfredi, 2010; Searby et al., 2015). This is particularly evident in this study, which views leadership learning through the intersectionality of gender, culture and ethnicity. The findings confirm that more long-term mentorship, guidance and support are needed for emergent leaders of immigrant status who represent ethnic and cultural minorities.

The main theoretical implication of these findings is the empowerment that women leaders gain from gendered, authentic and situated leadership learning through notable persons, solidarity and experience. In this sense, the study advances the synthesis of two theories: feminist poststructuralism and educational leadership applied to identity research.

5.2.5. LEADERSHIP IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AGAINST THE GLASS CEILING DISCOURSE

The findings of this research largely confirm previous research into the barriers preventing women's career progression. While aligning themselves with the postfeminist discourse of choice (Gill, 2014), the women in these studies often experience a lack of confidence and the glass ceiling effect of the institutional hierarchy and control (Cotter, 2001; Mullany, 2022; Williams, 2014), which restricts their agency, leading to identity regulation (Alvesson &

Wilmott, 2002). However, the impact of the glass ceiling in the current study differs for each narrative and yields different results.

Nina's experience of being overpowered by the hierarchical organisational structure (Williams, 2014) leaves her undervalued and unrecognised as a "cog in the machine". While Aadam's scholarship achievements have been dismissed by the promotional panel as not part of her role, highlighting her hybrid role insecurity (Whitchurch, 2008).

Margarita's glass ceiling effect is felt through the loss of her academic identity and the failure of the university to inform her of upcoming promotional opportunities. Jaleela's promotional aspirations are constrained by the discourse of managerial hierarchy, while Basma is overpowered by the lack of prospects at the Language Centre. Thus, the women in this study perform leadership against the discourse of the glass ceiling and uncertainty about the future.

The findings from an integrative review of studies on migrant women from minority backgrounds in academic leadership progression are in line with the findings of this thesis (Coleman et al., 2023). They are also supported by the study of UK university EDI policies and individual experiences of academics from diverse ethnic backgrounds progressing to leadership (Heslop-Martin, 2024). The case studies of women's leadership careers in international educational contexts and female leadership progression constrained by the gendered management discourse also uncover similar glass ceiling or glass walls effect moderated by culture (Acker, 2014; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Kloot, 2004).

However, another leadership identity study conducted in a gender-sensitive Turkish university setting renders different results (Işık-Guler & Erdoğan-Ozturk, 2022). The glass ceiling effect experienced by women is linked to the masculine community of practice, contrary to the findings of this thesis related to hierarchical organisational structure and contractual regulations.

Thus, in line with poststructuralist theory, this study reveals that gender is not the only factor preventing women from progression within the academic world. The managerial hierarchy, the lack of career prospects within the IWLPs, contractual limitations and the loss of academic identity due to migration status are the most cited career challenges for the participants. The study suggests that more support is needed at the IWLP level for women to progress, including the review of organisational structure and employment contracts.

5.2.6. MIDDLE MANAGERS' LEADERSHIP IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AGAINST THE DISCOURSES OF NEW MANAGERIALISM AND GOVERNMENTALITY

The dilemmatic nature of the participants' middle manager's identity is invoked by the discourse of neoliberalism (Ball, 2012; Deem, 1998; Gill & Scharff, 2011), governmentality (Morrissey, 2013) and new managerialism (Hill & Kumar, 2009; Lynch, 2014; Lynch & Ivancheva, 2015). The findings confirm the reviewed literature of middle managers confronted by the discourse of contractual inequality (Calvert et al., 2011; Sutton, 2015; Winter, 2009). This study also contributes to the dilemmatic identity theory, demonstrating how and why the participants shift their positioning between being critical of some organisational values and being complicit with the managerial discourse.

Thus, Mona aligns with the discourse of the commercialisation of universities (Collini, 2017). Yet, she is critical of the departmental policy of marginalisation of Arabic as commercially less viable than the European languages, as reflected in previous studies (Drobnik-Rogers & Torres, 2024; Soliman & Khalil, 2024). She also makes a stance against power imbalance and contractual inequity of the teachers in her team. Thus, she performs dual solidarity with both the team and the management, projecting a dilemmatic in-group/out-group identity (Taifel & Turner, 1978) against the discourse of coloniality and silencing (Columbu, 2022; Moncrieffe, 2020; Kaseem, 2024; Ramadan, 2017).

In contrast to Mona's dilemmatic stance, Nina positions herself as overtly critical of the contractual inequality of her colleagues on zero-hour and fractional contracts. In the same vein, Aadab, in her position as a middle manager and a union representative, is resistant to the discourse of governmentality (Foucault, 2018; Gray et al., 2018; Morrissey, 2013). She cites the application of SWARM (Simple Workload Allocation and Resource Management) to the workload allocation as a bureaucratic, exploitative tool and campaigns for fairer workload distribution on behalf of her team.

Most women act agentively against the organisational structure and develop strategies to counter the management decisions, leading their teams to better working practices and pedagogical excellence. Thus, Aadab is critical of the slow and chaotic response of management to staff training. She counteracts the discourse of inefficiency by initiating digital training for her team, which continues beyond the pandemic. Similarly, Mila juxtaposes her digital competence against her manager's inadequate response to training. Meanwhile, Margarita confronts the new managerial discourse (Lynch, 2015) by leading her

team in a campaign for better contractual conditions and fair pay, a positive outcome of which is empowering.

All women experience identity manipulation (Preston & Price, 2012) and identity struggle (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) as middle managers. While attempting to be agentic in their leadership, they are constrained by the lack of support and unmanageable workload (Morley, 2013, 2014), resulting in emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012; Iszatt-White, 2009). The metaphors some women use for self-expression make their struggle more visible: they range between “giving blood” to “killing” and “burning” themselves at work, “sailing, floating and sinking a boat”, “feeling the way in the dark”, “keeping head above water” and “being on thin ice”.

The women are either ignored, dismissed or only partially supported by the organisation, revealing different stages of institutional neglect towards middle managers (Floyd, 2016). Nina and Aadab are denied workload allocation for the scholarship. While Nina navigates her leadership “on thin ice”, Mila is disempowered by the lack of support for her pedagogic creativity. Faiza claims that the support offered is inadequate. Aadab refers to the formality of support as lip service and a box-ticking exercise. For Margarita, Jaleela and Basma, institutional neglect is manifested in being rejected as academics through a lack of mentoring or time allocated to scholarship development.

As middle managers, the women are often conflicted between being part of the teachers’ team and performing leadership roles and developing “us” versus “them” identities (Davis et al., 2014). Their positioning is often dilemmatic: wishing to be part of the team and yet being outsiders. For example, Basma subscribes to the values and culture of IWLP in opposition to the language department. At the same time, she experiences imposter syndrome and self-doubt due to perceived jealousy from her team members. Mona claims a strong cultural alliance with her team against the management’s marginalisation of her language and her team, yet she supports the departmental commercial policy.

Other participants resist organisational values (Rintoul & Goulais, 2010) and assert themselves as outsiders within the organisation, claiming the out-group identity (Taifel & Turner, 1978) through non-alignment with the organisational culture. Thus, Svetlana takes an agentic stance against the discourse of university radicalisation in times of political change. Aadab, Jaleela, Margarita and Basma also question their loyalty to the institution due to being excluded from the academic discourse on the grounds of immigration, motherhood

and role limitation, while balancing between imagined (scholarly) and prescribed (managerial) identities (Billot, 2010; Winter, 2009).

As middle managers, they perform hybrid identities (Whitchurch, 2008) against the discourse of hierarchical managerial culture (Davis et al., 2014), positioned as third space professionals (Burchielli et al., 2008; Whitchurch, 2008). All women experience role unpredictability (McNaughton & Billot, 2016), gleaned mostly from the narratives of Aadab, Faizah, Margarita and Nuria, who are burdened with heavy workload, stress and anxiety.

All participants in the study experience role ambiguity. Mila, as a reluctant middle manager (Scase & Goffee, 2017), values her teaching autonomy above all and is constrained by heroic leadership discourse (Clifton, 2017; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). Nuria, as an accidental leader (Floyd, 2016), becomes a manager due to organisational restructuring (Beck & Young, 2005), while Nina, as an appointed manager, balances between the roles of academic manager and managed academic (Whitchurch, 2008). Their dilemmatic and fragmented identities' work (Bamberg, 2006) results in identity control and role incongruity (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brescoll, 2011; Hochschild, 2012; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Nuria reports a loss of managerial identity due to not having a voice in decision-making. Faiza, Margarita, Mila and Jaleela are also positioned as not being heard by the university management. As middle managers, they often shift between being agentive actors and undergoers, questioning their role while managing the teams without authority. All the women interviewed revealed that their problematic leadership experience was encumbered by the middle manager's role limitation and ambiguity. They claim the lack of agency and disempowerment in performing leadership due to the lack of authority.

Their narratives point to the widening gap between the organisation and the middle managers, constructing their identities against the neoliberal discourse of autonomy (Gill & Scharff, 2011). The workload intensification, institutional neglect and role ambiguity findings concur with previous research on the lack of support for middle managers (Floyd & Dimmock, 2011) and the pressure of balancing between new managerialism and academic values (Meek et al., 2010). The formulaic approach to training middle managers to maintain the top-down managerial "us versus them" culture (Davis et al., 2014, p.9) has also been documented in previous studies (Floyd, 2016). The empirical study of women academics in three universities responding to the challenge of the new managerial discourse also relates to my findings (Thomas & Davies, 2002).

The results of this study contribute to middle management theory by highlighting the challenges facing middle managers' hybrid identity formation through the intersection of gender, culture and ethnicity within the context of IWLP. The data suggest that, confronted by the discourses of new managerialism and governmentality, the women experience role ambiguity, which results in identity struggle. Thus, more structured support and intervention are needed from the university management, particularly for female middle managers from minority backgrounds.

5.3. RQ2. HOW IS LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCED THROUGH INTERACTION BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSES OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND CURRICULUM REVIEW AND PERSONAL DISCOURSES OF GENDER, CULTURE, AND ETHNICITY?

The participants' leadership identities are shaped through the interaction between personal and professional discourses. The narratives invoke the discourses of institutional change and curriculum review as the most significant factors in the women's leadership experience through the intersection of gender, culture and ethnicity.

5.3.1. Leadership experienced through institutional change

The challenges of institutional changes confronting the participants have been categorised into several elements: new role expectations, technological innovations and the increased layers of management control, confirming some previous scholarship findings (Billot, 2010; Briggs, 2007; Deem & Lucas, 2007; Smith, 2010; Sutton, 2015). However, the thesis reveals a new finding concerning the middle manager's identity shift due to the transfer from teaching only to an academic contract in the context of the IWLP.

5.3.1.1. Contractual change

The most significant change affecting women is the transfer from teaching only to the AEP (Academic Education Pathway) contract, which incorporates elements of teaching, leadership and research. All participants expressed anxiety about the new role expectations, but for different reasons. For example, lacking a strong academic background, Mona doubts her ability to lead the team in scholarship development, while Nina, a managed academic (Winter, 2009), is frustrated by the lack of managerial support for her role. Aadab refers to herself as a trapped academic (Cummins, 2017) performing three roles for the same remuneration, while Margarita, Jaleela and Basma cite increased workload and the lack of academic mentoring as the main problems resulting from a contractual change.

Jaleela's reference to research being undervalued by the management and Mona and Nina's concern about the broad parameters of this pathway sum up the neoliberal (Hill & Kumar, 2009) nature of this contract. The employees are given the freedom to engage in all three activities – management, teaching and scholarship yet they are not enabled to do so by the organisation and fail in at least one of the roles. Although designed to reward and recognise teachers/managers' scholarship contributions, these contracts are governed by managerial practices. Within the discourse of governmentality (Foucault, 2018; Gray et al., 2018; Morrissey, 2013), institutions set targets and regulate workload allocation, as illustrated by Jaleela's reference to the limited time allocated to research. Nina is also critical of the bureaucratisation of the AEP application process, which she brands a loss of human resources.

5.3.1.2. Technological innovations and increased managerial control

The changes in organisational hierarchy and increased bureaucracy are another cause of stress for the participants, identified most strongly by Nina, Mila, Jaleela, Nuria and Basma. These organisational changes have led to agency limitation, role ambiguity (Schulz, 2013), disempowerment and identity conflict (McNaughton et al., 2014; Hanson, 2009). The technological innovations imposed on their roles are put into question by Mila and Nuria, who count them as an infringement on their creative freedom. Mila metaphorically describes the way her creativity could flourish in the organisation before the changes were introduced as a "fairy tale in a swamp". The additional layers of management control and the compulsory use of AI in lessons leave her anxious and uncertain about the future.

While both Aadab and Nuria acknowledge that workload intensification, which started during the pandemic with the turn towards digital pedagogy and has not subsided, they are concerned about different things. Aadab is keen to implement new technology further, but lacks managerial support, while Nuria questions the management's decisions to implement more changes. Nuria's anxiety about the imposed changes is aggravated by the discourse of illness (Winter, 2009; Calvert et al., 2011). She also experiences the loss of her institutional identity due to the IWLP being merged with the language department, making her employment position precarious. Her leadership positioning is compromised by the changes in the organisation, which she is unable to control or understand. This leads to identity stress and regulation (Alvesson, 2012).

5.3.2. Leadership experienced through curriculum review

The findings uncover new knowledge in the way leadership identities are developed through the process of curriculum decolonising review in line with the UK university policy, contextualised by the specificity of the Russian and Arabic languages and cultures.

5.3.2.1. Curriculum decolonising versus postcolonial academic legacies

While most Arabic-speaking participants align themselves with decolonising and decentring discourse in teaching Arabic, as reflected in the reviewed literature (Arday et al., 2020; Shain et al., 2023), they also question the university policy of curriculum decolonising as a “fashion fad” (Abu Moghli, 2021). Aadam is critical of her university's policy for curriculum decolonising, which is Eurocentric in its essence and excludes academic research in Arabic. Thus, she makes a stance against academic tokenism in favour of decolonising academic traditions (Tamimi et al., 2024; Trahar et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2024).

Basma reiterates Aadam's standpoint against the centrism of English in academia and particularly against the colonial legacy of Arabic textbook writing (Columbu, 2022; Moncrieffe, 2020; Kaseem, 2024). The story of her textbook, which she wrote at night while feeding her children and which was later rejected by an English professor, is illustrative of the power imbalance, silencing and exclusion in a postcolonial university that nevertheless promotes a decolonising agenda. Similarly, for Mona, decolonising starts with recognising the equal status of Arabic alongside other European languages by removing postcolonial educational legacies (Soliman & Khalil, 2024).

The recent autoethnographic study of Muslim academics through intersectionality between race, religion, class, and ethnicity reveals their experiences with Eurocentric curriculum, imposter syndrome and tokenism, which are similar to my findings (Faheem & Rahman, 2024). The research into curriculum decolonising practices in a UK university conducted by a Muslim scholar (Kassem, 2024) concludes that they do not go far enough in dismantling the Eurocentric epistemic framework to achieve equitable results, which aligns with my findings.

5.3.2.2. Decolonising the Russian curriculum, what does it mean?

The investigation reveals a new interesting finding about Russian participants navigating the curriculum review. They are confronted by differing ontological views of Western and Russian scholars and by the current Russophobic tendencies in some UK academic circles (Lieven, 2000). The participants' own positionings on decolonising are varied and embedded in their individual cultural, educational, and ethnic backgrounds. Their professional identities,

constructed within the decolonising framework through self-reflection, research and professional development, are often at odds with their national, cultural and ethnic identities, thus causing identity struggle.

All participants claim the Russian curriculum decolonising process is ambiguous, controversial and heavily influenced by the geopolitical situation and institutional policies (Byford et al., 2024; Kamusella, 2024). They experience curriculum review through the intersection between ethnic, national and political identities. While Margarita takes a more balanced stance against the adverse political discourse (Dadabaev, 2013), Svetlana categorically opposes the idea of equating decolonising the Russian curriculum to cancelling Russian culture, institutionalised silencing and othering of Russian colleagues (Melnikova & Vasilyeva, 2024; Norris, 2023).

The women cite the breakdown in the relationship between Russia and the UK due to the war in Ukraine as the most significant geopolitical factor affecting their Russian curriculum review. These include the breakdown of academic ties and student exchanges, the challenging task of navigating sensitive political and cultural debates in classes and maintaining students' motivation. All three are overpowered by the constraints of a hostile political climate, resulting in identity regulation and emotional stress, leaving them feeling "tormented" and "drained", but also hopeful.

Nuria has to work hard to keep the students' enthusiasm. However, she is also hopeful that the barrier of mistrust will be overcome. Both Nuria and Svetlana take a critical, agentic stance against decolonising curriculum, calling it a "fad". In her protest against the university policy, Svetlana unsubscribes from "Decolonising Russian" newsletters, stops attending seminars and refuses to "wear a guilty face" or "toe the party line". Her critical stance against the black-and-white decolonising policy is metaphorically rendered as accepting Russian only "under the sauce of the imperialist past". While Nuria is encouraged by the apparent status quo on the subject of Russian in her academic environment, Svetlana is critical of her university's radicalisation and silencing of Russian academics.

Both Svetlana and Nuria take a stance against academic freedom restrictions related to decolonising policies. Nuria strongly opposes the decentring of gender in the Russian curriculum, calling it a "fad" and expressing concern for this to become a policy, infringing on her freedom to choose how to teach the Russian language, culture and society. Her stance against the values imposed on her is uncompromising and in sync with both Svetlana's and

Mila's. For all three of them, freedom to teach their subject the way they see fit is a privilege, and to lose this freedom would equate to losing their jobs.

Both Margarita and Nuria also experience curriculum decolonising through the intersection of language and ethnicity. While they do not look ethnically Slavic, they can identify with Russian ethnic minorities, thus ascribing to a decolonising agenda and avoiding conflict situations. Both Margarita and Nuria use their ethnic identity as a teaching point. The complexity of the issue is encapsulated in the way they respond to questions about their ethnicity and mastery of Russian. While Nuria consciously avoids confrontations, Margarita takes an agentic stance against the discourse of ignorance, racial discrimination and exclusion on the grounds of her ethnicity (Ayala-López, 2018; Kebabi, 2024). She positions herself as a Russian national and makes the Russian language an identity marker. However, she is also compelled to develop her internal coping mechanism to help her overcome identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), making an emotional effort not to get upset by the people's cultural insensitivity.

Thus, most of my participants take a proactive stance against curriculum review. Their leadership experience empowers them to oppose the organisational values (Rintoul & Goulais, 2010), particularly in relation to political hatred and gender representation (Morris et al., 2022). Due to the novelty of the issue, the subject of identity regulation and leadership experience through both Arabic and Russian curriculum review has not yet been previously investigated; thus, the findings of this thesis are unique and require further confirmation through subsequent studies.

5.4. RQ3. HOW DO THE PARTICIPANTS' IDENTITIES SHIFT FROM DILEMMATIC TO AGENTIVE WHEN RESISTING OR ALIGNING WITH DOMINANT SOCIETAL DISCOURSES?

The findings of dilemmatic identity construction are unique to this study and contribute to research on narrative identity in education through intersection with gender, culture and ethnicity (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Barkhuizen, 2017; De Fina, 2009; Gallardo, 2019; Ford, 2006). Aligning with the feminist poststructuralist agenda, the study provides new findings on the transformative power of narrative as both the site and the means of identity construction.

Throughout the narratives, the participants make dilemmatic identity claims about being authoritative yet anxious about their leadership; being agentic yet reliant on external actors

in their leadership development; being part of the institution yet rejecting some of its values. By making these claims, they gradually become more agentic against the discourses of inequality, unfairness, exclusion and managerialism, proving the transformative force of identity co-construction through narrative in interaction. The sections below exemplify this transformation.

5.4.1. Developing agentic stance against gendered discourse

Basma tells three contrasting stories to illustrate her agentic development as an educational leader against the cultural gendered ideology discourse. In the first story, she conforms to traditional gendered role division: she gives up her career as an architect to become a teacher, due to her belief that men should be architects and women should do anything which fits with their caring duties. In the second story, she performs agently and creatively against the sexist discourse of intellectual dominance (Lewis et al., 2017; Gill, 2008; Sørensen, 2017) by writing a humorous poem about the male antagonist and performing it in front of the audience. This performance was her subversive protest against academic misogyny, which achieved the desired effect. In the third story, she is positioned as a competent and confident leader who is overtly critical of the two male colleagues, members of her team, who cannot accept feedback from a female leader due to their role stereotyping. Thus, her identity shifts from being overpowered by the patriarchal gendered discourse (Afiouni, 2014) to being creatively agentic against academic misogyny (De Welde & Stepnick, 2023) and finally to being fully assertive in her stance against sexism in the workplace (Savigny, 2014).

5.4.2. From dilemmatic to agentic against organisational discourse

In some narratives, the women's stance against organisational control and career limitations shifts from being dilemmatic to agentic during interaction, as conveyed linguistically by the use of, at first, neutral and gradually more emotive and critical lexis. The example from Nina's critical stance against the discourse of bureaucratic organisational procedures and managerialism (Hill & Kumar, 2009) illustrates this positioning shift: at the beginning of the narrative, she uses neutral vocabulary to describe her positioning towards managerial discourse – "surprised", "discouraged", "depressed", "frustrated". Towards the end, she uses overtly critical and emotionally charged vocabulary to describe the bureaucratic limitations of the organisational management: "insulting", "incredible loss of human resources".

The initial subdued stance is related to Nina's innate cultural beliefs and surprise that this level of authoritarian control and hierarchical decision-making existed beyond Russian universities, as reflected in the existing literature (Elliott & Tudge, 2013; Mercer & Pogolian, 2013; Oleksiyenko, 2022; Panova, 2008). However, she becomes progressively more vocal in her protest against the "semi-feudal and hierarchical system" of the UK universities towards the end of the narrative, thus making an agentic stance against the discourse of new managerialism.

5.4.3. From dilemmatic to agentic against the discourse of inequality

Mona's narrative illustrates the strengthening of her agentic stance to counter the discourse of unfair and unequal treatment, as she finds ways to overturn management decisions regarding her team. At the start of the narrative, she is complacent and aligns herself with the organisational culture of commercialisation and market forces regulating the supply and demand of language teaching. However, the interaction with the researcher reveals her critical stance against the departmental policy towards Arabic, which is cast aside as not commercially viable. Eventually, her stance against inequality becomes more agentic through her managerial support of a colleague forced out of her job due to caring responsibilities: "It was just not fair".

Through interaction and the negotiation of meaning, the women's identities shift from dilemmatic, overpowered by societal discourses, to agentic, taking action against gender inequality, injustice, organisational hierarchy and academic exclusion. These patterns of empowerment are visible across all cases.

These examples demonstrate the power of the narratives, in which the narrators' identities shift from dilemmatic to agentic, from submissive to external forces, to confronting societal discourses of inequality, managerialism, sexism and oppression. Similar patterns have been observed in previous studies to which positioning analysis was applied (Işık-Güler & Erdoğan-Öztürk, 2022; Jones & Clifton, 2018). However, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no previous research on dilemmatic identity work in the UK higher education context.

5.5. MY POSITIONALITY

My positionality as a feminist poststructuralist has strengthened during this investigation. Throughout all stages of this inquiry, I strived to maintain the power balance between being a member of the researched community and the researcher. Although my professional and scholarly background has enhanced my agency as an insider researcher, I endeavoured not to

impose my preconceived ideas on data interpretation. This was achieved by being self-reflexive and conscious of rebalancing the powers, aiming for equality and reciprocity between the researcher and the researched (Baxter, 2003).

At the same time, I felt privileged to have a unique perspective on the problem within the specific institutional context while being embedded in the IWLP community of practice. The good level of trust and rapport established with the participants helped me uncover hidden meanings and essential details in their frank and often highly emotional narratives (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002; Ellis & Bochner, 2016; Wortham, 2000).

My own understanding of leadership development, practice and career obstructions has been further sharpened by my engagement in this research. The findings related to marginalisation, elitism, cultural and gender tokenism, sexism and academic exclusion within UK universities have challenged my original assumptions but also upheld my belief in the transformative power of the narrative. As a feminist poststructuralist researcher, I am now even more convinced of the need to uncover further instances of inequality and oppression within the localised settings to eliminate power imbalance.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

This chapter will summarise the study and its key findings. It will then outline the study's original contribution to knowledge, limitations, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research.

6.1. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

6.1.2. Research objectives, theories and methodology

The purpose of the study was to reveal the problematic leadership experiences and complexities of identity construction among middle managers in UK universities' Institute-Wide Language Programmes (IWLPs). This has been achieved through the analysis of rich data gathered from the narrative accounts of ten female participants of Arabic and Russian backgrounds. The aim was to advance the knowledge of gendered educational leadership by giving voice to the underrepresented non-Western European minority of female middle managers and to reveal emerging new identities at a time of organisational change. To my knowledge, this study is the first to investigate the gendered identity construction of educational leaders from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds, contextualised by the under-researched IWLP community of practice.

The conceptual framework, consisting of four interrelated concepts – educational leadership, leadership experience, institutional/organisational change and dilemmatic identity is underpinned by feminist poststructuralist theory, which permeates across all stages of the study. The thesis also draws on educational leadership theory, gendered leadership experience, discourse and identity, critical race and organisational culture and change theories.

My positionality as a feminist poststructuralist insider researcher underscores all stages of the inquiry, including the choice of interpretivist/constructivist paradigm, feminist poststructuralist discourse methodology and multiple case study research design. The narrative approach with a specific focus on small story as a site of identity construction was adopted to reveal the details of identity work at the intersection of leadership, gender, culture, age and ethnicity.

The interactive narratives of ten participants were analysed in four stages, applying a unique analytical framework consisting of thematic, positioning and narrative analyses. This strategy helped to achieve a deep understanding of women's career stories, experiences, perceptions,

ambitions and ambiguities. As a result of this multi-layered data interrogation, this study draws a nuanced and complex portrait of individual female educational leadership construction in the context of IWLP. The application of this analytical method is novel and creates new knowledge.

The three sections below summarise the main findings that help to answer the research questions.

6.1.3. LEADERSHIP IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE CONTEXT OF IWLPs

The study uncovered many problematic areas which affect women's identity construction. The participants construct their leadership identities against the intersection of societal discourses of immigration, academic elitism and institutional othering. While encountering these discourses, the female leaders experience imposter syndrome, identity regulation and identity loss. They report incidents of marginalisation on the grounds of their immigration, educational status and non-native English proficiency.

These findings support a substantial body of research into existing **institutional othering and marginalisation** through the intersection of gender, race, class, age, language and ethnicity in education (for example, Ayala-López, 2018; Sørensen, 2017).

A significant finding from the study reveals a **sexist discourse of intellectual dominance and covert discrimination** on the grounds of gender and ethnicity. The discourse of **academic exclusion and cultural tokenism** has been identified by the majority of participants as an "old boys' club" (Weiner & Burton, 2016, p.341) in which there is no space for others and where they feel like outsiders. This finding on **discriminatory practices at the intersection of gender and ethnicity** is supported by the body of literature (for example, Faheem & Rahman, 2024; Heslop-Martin, 2024; Weekes et al., 2024). However, it also contradicts findings of some recent research, declaring positive outcomes for women migrants (Jacobs et al., 2022). Thus, more studies are needed in this area to provide further evidence.

Another significant finding of **marginalisation on the grounds of language proficiency** reveals the prevalence of Eurocentric intellectual practices that privilege native English academic proficiency over all others, resulting in the participants' identity stress and regulation. This area is supported by only a few recent studies, which highlight the **hegemonic power of English** and instances of silencing (for example, Brown et al., 2024;

Horn, 2017; Tamimi et al., 2024). As decolonising and decentring pedagogic and academic practices remain high on the UK university agenda, this area requires closer investigation.

The findings reveal how female leaders resist or conform to the cultural and gendered societal norms and expectations of the participants' backgrounds. They construct their leadership against the **discourse of misogyny, patriarchal gender ideology, tokenism, gendered stereotyping and sexism**, often obscured by the postfeminist discourse of choice. These findings provide further evidence of the way leadership is developed through the intersection of culture, gender and ethnicity, relevant to the Middle Eastern and Russian cultural gender role assumptions. The study advocates for a nuanced and culturally specific approach to identity within a feminist poststructuralist framework.

On the whole, the incidents of sexism experienced by the participants support the research in the literature on gender stereotyping prevalent in the Middle Eastern culture (Afiouni, 2014; Koburtay & Abuhussein, 2021). However, the new finding of this research is the **agentic stance** the participants develop against acts of misogyny within the teams the women lead.

Another interesting finding relates to the revealed contradiction between some of the Russian participants' alignment with the neoliberal discourse of autonomy (Jones & Floyd, 2024) and the traditional **gendered discourse of second shifting** – performing multiple identities (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). This finding is supported by only a few similar studies of Russian academics negotiating work/life balance post migration (for example, Antoshchuk & Gewinner, 2020) and present a gap in the area.

The key finding regarding leadership development against the **discourse of motherhood in academia** demonstrates the persistence of **unmanageable workloads** handled by women caught between **two “greedy organisations”** (Morley, 2000b, p.3) – family and university. This is evidenced by the body of research (for example, Cotterill & Letherby, 2005; Deem, 2003; Grummell et al., 2008). However, the new finding reveals, on the one hand, the emotional response of women constrained by this gendered academic discourse and, on the other hand, uncovers the way of countering it through **solidarity** with other women.

The study provides valuable insights into the way women learn to lead **through personal experience, notable people, formal training and mentorship**. They have learnt to become post-heroic, distributed and collaborative leaders through **situated learning, critical**

incidents and by acquiring self-knowledge, thus confirming the existing research. (Fletcher, 2004; Kempster, 2006; Northouse, 2020). Although the findings of the study highlight the benefits of women-only leadership training programmes in line with some previous studies (for example, Debebe et al., 2016), the female leaders in this study claim these programmes to be **box-ticking half-measures**. Contrary to earlier research into the positive impact of mentorship (for example, Searby et al., 2015), the current study uncovered a significant **lack of long-term mentorship** in leadership and scholarship offered to the participants. Additionally, the study reveals evidence of reluctant and accidental leadership, lacking in leadership training and managerial support. These insights into the middle managers' leadership learning may have policy-changing implications.

The discourse of the **glass ceiling** is encountered by all participants, as confirmed by the body of research into the **institutional barriers** to women's career progression (for example, Coleman et al., 2023; Mullany, 2022). However, viewed through the intersectional lens, the findings of this study add to the under-researched area of women's higher education **career obstruction within the intersection of leadership, ethnicity and culture** (for example, Işık-Guler & Erdoğan-Ozturk, 2022; Kloot, 2004). These findings also contribute to the application of social role and critical race theory in educational research. The combined or synthesised application of these theories to the leadership development of women from diverse cultural backgrounds offers **a new theoretical framework** for educational leadership research.

While confirming the previous findings of middle managers' identities being hybrid and unstable (Floyd & Dimmock, 2011), the participants in this study act agentively when encountering **contractual inequality, coloniality and academic silencing**. All of them critically oppose the **discourse of governmentality** (Foucault, 2018) and **the new managerialism** (Lynch, 2015). In doing so, they lead their teams in campaigning for better contracts and working practices to achieve **a power balance between the organisation and the individuals**. The study provides evidence of agentive leadership identity construction through solidarity and **collaboration**. Although previous research supports this finding (for example, Kempster & Steward, 2010), it represents new knowledge in the context of IWLPs.

The study adds to the body of research on middle managers' **identity manipulation and institutional neglect**, exacerbated by high levels of **workload intensification, role unpredictability, stress and anxiety** (Burchielli et al., 2008; Whitchurch, 2008). It is particularly insightful in highlighting the intensely emotional metaphors the women use to

refer to their middle management identity work. All of them report **a lack of support** and guidance from the senior management.

The study also contributes to organisational culture research, revealing the intricate and dilemmatic way the participants navigate between **“us versus them” identities** (Davis et al., 2014, p.9), being critical of the organisation while simultaneously supporting organisational values. The new knowledge delivered by this study is the way the participants shift their alliances from the values of the team they manage to the management values, balancing between **support and criticism of the managerial discourse**.

As evidenced by earlier research, departmental values are sustained and often initiated by the staff, rather than by senior management (Floyd, 2016), and contribute to professional academic identity constructions. Thus, there is a need for a better understanding of the unique culture of IWLP and the interaction between the university, faculty and departmental values fostered by the individuals. In order for the middle managers to promote organisational values, they need to feel valued. Thus, policy changes are required at the institutional level.

6.1.4. LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCED THROUGH ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND CURRICULUM REVIEW

The findings on leadership experience at a time of institutional change and curriculum review resonate with the literature on professional identity construction through the intersection of other identity aspects viewed within a feminist poststructuralist framework (Acker, 2018). Within the IWLP context, the participants, to a lesser or greater extent, experience identity stress and **tension between professional values and institutional identities due to organisational changes**, confirming earlier research (Calvert et al., 2011; Winter, 2009).

The findings reveal that the transfer to the Academic Pathway contract (AEP), although meant to enhance opportunities for women’s progression, has caused a high level of anxiety due to **uncertainty about the new role expectations** and the **increased workload** without increased remuneration. The study unearthed a significant finding revealing the combination of factors obstructing women’s career advancement in the given higher education sector. Besides the already discussed intersectional aspect, the participants speak of the **barriers set by the hierarchical organisational structure of IWLP** and their middle managers’ **role incongruity stemming from the AEP contract**. This results in identity work of becoming either **academic managers or managed academics**. The participants were concerned about

their performance in at least one of the three roles – management, scholarship and teaching. Those lacking academic training and experience were anxious about the demands of the additional scholarship role, while those with an academic background were unhappy about the **minimal workload allocated for research versus a heavy teaching workload**, resulting in a **“teaching trap”** (Cummins, 2017, p.13). Thus, all participants experienced **identity regulation** (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Due to the recent implementation of AEP transfer, the findings affecting middle managers’ identity within the context of IWLP are new and significant. By revealing the ways the middle manager’s educational identity conforms or resists the discourse of **new managerialism within the context of AEP transitioning**, the study provides a valuable resource with policy-making implications.

Another finding uncovers the challenges women face when they encounter the university policy change towards compulsory use of AI in some universities and further digitalisation of education. They claim **agency limitation and pedagogical creativity restriction**, causing additional identity stress and anxiety. The data of this study contribute to the knowledge of professional identity construction through the discourse of organisational change and the theory of organisational culture contextualised by IWLP and perceived as a dynamic process within the feminist poststructuralist framework.

The new knowledge of how leadership is experienced through curriculum review is unveiled by the study. The attitudes of teachers and education leaders to decolonising Russian and Arabic language curricula have had very little coverage in the past (Richardson et al., 2024). The findings on decolonising Arabic curriculum reflect the participants’ **alignment with the decolonising discourse**, supported by the literature (Arday et al., 2020; Shain et al., 2023). However, most participants position themselves critically against the **tokenism** in the policy, its temporality, a **tribute to fashion** and **persistent Eurocentrism in pedagogy**. These findings expand on earlier studies and provide a different vision on leadership in curriculum review (Columbu, 2022; Faheem & Rahman, 2024; Winter et al., 2024).

The previously unexplored area of Russian managers’ response to curriculum decolonising is highly significant. There was consensus among the participants in the present study that what is claimed to be decolonising the Russian language is **ambiguous, controversial and highly political**. Some claim that it stems from cancelling Russian culture and rewriting history, while others refer to this as a tool for **marginalising some Russian teachers and**

radicalising the university student population. All Russian leaders agree with their Arabic colleagues that decolonising is a “fad” and refuse to adhere to the university policy, perceiving this to be an **infringement on their academic and pedagogic freedom.**

Another interesting finding in relation to curriculum decolonising and intersectionality is disclosed in the narratives of the participants who are ethnically non-Slavic. In their stance against ignorance and racial and ethnic discrimination, they upset the status quo and became **agents of change**, making their ethnic and national identity pedagogically significant. These revelations go beyond the existing body of literature on decolonising Russian (for example, Kamusella, 2024; Norris, 2023) and present new knowledge.

Thus, the findings uncover the women’s agentic positioning towards curriculum review, which is mostly critical. The problematic leadership experience of both Russian and Arabic education leaders at a time of geopolitical conflict calls for further research, particularly in the areas of identity work, freedom of expression and an adverse institutional climate.

6.1.5. IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE NARRATIVE – FROM DILEMMATIC TO AGENTIVE

The significant finding of the study is the confirmation of **the transformative force of the narrative** in constructing a gendered cultural leadership identity. It highlights the dilemmatic agency of the participants who either conform or resist the dominant societal discourses encountered through the course of small storytelling. Within the feminist poststructuralist framework, the narrative becomes an **emancipatory tool** for women to **develop agency and empowerment.**

The study introduces new knowledge to the body of research on narrative educational identities through the intersection of gender, culture and ethnicity (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2015; Barkhuizen, 2017; Ford, 2006). The thesis advances **the dilemmatic identity theory** (Bamberg, 2011) by shedding new light on the way the participants construct their identities against societal discourses. In the course of storytelling, they shift between being undergoers of external forces to being active agents, wanting to remain the same while being subject to change and belonging to the group yet wishing to be different.

The stories told by the female leaders highlight the dilemmatic and agentic aspects through **implicit and explicit claims** in relation to their leadership experience and leadership learning. Through these claims, they either **support or reject organisational values** and change. They either **confront or submit to societal discourses** of managerialism, sexism, radicalisation,

academic exclusion, gender and ethnic discrimination, silencing, institutional othering, institutional neglect, career limitation, motherhood in academia and neoliberalism. The analysis provides unique examples of such identity shifts.

Although a limited number of studies have dealt with dilemmatic identity in leadership and education (Jones & Clifton, 2018; Işık-Güler & Erdoğan-Öztürk, 2022), this is a pioneering study of dilemmatic identity in a UK higher education setting.

6.2. ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The following original contributions to knowledge have been identified and helped outline the recommendations for policy and practice introduced in section 6.4 of this chapter.

A key contribution to knowledge by the study is the exploration of the way leadership is experienced by women from Arabic and Russian backgrounds in a UK higher education setting. To the best of the present researcher's knowledge, this study is the first gendered leadership identity research in the context of IWLP. It is **original in its consideration of the societal discourses that become relevant for leadership identity construction through the intersection of gender, culture and ethnicity**. They have been identified through the women's narrative and the feminist poststructuralist positionality of the researcher. They include **discourses of managerialism, governmentality, immigration, academic status, sexism, radicalisation, academic exclusion, gender and ethnic discrimination, silencing, marginalisation, institutional othering, institutional neglect, career limitation, motherhood in academia, neoliberalism, political adversity, and organisational change**.

The study offers a **novel conceptual framework** underpinned by the concepts of **educational leadership, experience, institutional change and dilemmatic identity**. The theoretical framework of the study, the interplay between leadership experience and leadership identity construction through the intersection between gender, culture and ethnicity, provides **new theoretical insights** into the subject of educational leadership.

The study advances feminist poststructuralist theory through its triangulation with other theories - educational gendered leadership experience, discourse and identity, dilemmatic identity, critical race theory, social role theory, organisational culture and change. Applied to the subject of gendered leadership in a culturally specific setting and tested by this study, this **theoretical triangulation** makes a unique contribution to knowledge and paves the way for further applications of this theoretical framework. An additional contribution is made

through the application of the **postcolonial strand of feminist poststructuralism to the intersectional identity formation** of ethnically and culturally underrepresented minorities of educational leaders.

The study makes a unique contribution to **middle management and organisational culture theories** through the intersection of gender, ethnicity and culture at a time of organisational change. It also contributes to knowledge through the application of **social role and critical race theories to the educational leadership** of women from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

This research enhances our understanding of leadership learning through lived experience and interventions, and uncovers the key problem of **tokenism and insufficient support in leadership training programmes and mentorship**. The study also uncovers new knowledge in leadership identity construction against **the institutional policy of curriculum review** with a decolonising agenda, shedding light on the problematic controversy of this under-researched subject.

It is significant in its original investigation of the dilemmatic leadership identity in UK higher education. This research advances **the dilemmatic identity theory** through its application to educational leadership research. It also demonstrates **the transformative power of narrative as a site of identity construction**.

The research design makes a unique methodological contribution to the development of a **combined method – a multiple case study and a narrative approach**, with the focus on a small story element. The main analytical tool of **positioning analysis, combined with the narrative and thematic analysis**, is also a novel analytical strategy for the robust in-depth investigation of educational identities. The application of this method to educational leadership is an emerging research area and **contributes to methodology**.

6.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

I acknowledge the limitation of the researcher's agency, undermined by the social context and the balance of hegemonic powers within society (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). My privileged access to some data due to my professional status may have reinforced certain assumptions and biases (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). I recognise the problematic issue of the researcher's bias and the difficulty of mitigating its influence on data and research credibility (Norum, 2000). I also acknowledge the possibility that the participants may have consciously

or unconsciously tailored their narratives to align with the research objectives and perceived expectations.

I am aware of the extent to which I can identify with some participants, such as speakers of Arabic, due to my different racial, cultural, and ethnic background (Gillies & Alldred, 2002). I also acknowledge that using English, rather than Arabic, as a medium of communication with some participants may have influenced my data interpretation and led to a potential loss of certain linguistic nuances. However, I attempted to overcome this limitation by verifying the transcripts with the participants and by closely engaging with the community and establishing affinity through professional practice, socialisation and research.

6.4. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The present study is transferable to the extent that its findings are recognisable in the wider IWLP context, while theoretical and methodological implications can apply to case study research beyond the IWLP context.

The following recommendations for policy and practice can be made based on the findings:

1. The findings of middle managers' identity construction within IWLP reveal institutional neglect and a lack of support for women's leadership and academic development. More adequate managerial support is needed for women to have time for training in the workload, with motivational and financial incentives to ensure a work/life balance.
2. Policies for including IWLP in the wider university structure are needed to ensure the programmes' sustainability.
3. More investments are required to rebalance the value of language study between commonly and less commonly taught languages, thus promoting the universities' internationalisation and students' employability agenda.
4. Educational policies aimed at better understanding the specificity of Russian and Arabic language teaching curricula, including the decolonising aspect, are needed.
5. The findings related to the problematic area of AEP contract change provide valuable information for human resources and the implications for policy changes. The findings suggest the need for better training and mentoring of middle managers transitioning from teaching-only to teaching, scholarship and management contracts, while enabling them to engage in pedagogical innovations and creativity.

6. The findings create opportunities for policy changes to advance social justice on matters of equity and fairness, thus promoting issues of educational diversity and inclusion, making universities more sustainable and progressive. Shedding light on the little-known area of IWLPs' leadership makes an original contribution to professional practice.

6.5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following recommendations can be made for future research:

1. Broader research into educational intersectional identity beyond the context of IWLP within UK higher education will test the verisimilitude of findings and increase the transferability of results.
2. Further studies may benefit from research into identity construction within the discourses of new managerialism, governmentality and neoliberalism in specific academic communities.
3. There is a need for a better understanding of the unique culture of IWLP and the interaction between the university, faculty and departmental values fostered by the individuals. Further research into the area of IWLP educational identity is needed.
4. More research is required in the area of identity work in relation to curriculum decolonising review within UK universities.
5. Further research into the effects of AEP contract transfers experienced by teachers and middle managers will help advance the knowledge of organisational change to drive an equitable agenda.
6. Further studies are needed to test the synthesis of the theories applied to the current research through the intersection of feminist poststructuralism, dilemmatic identity, social role, critical race, educational leadership, middle management, organisational culture and change theories.
7. More studies are required in the area of middle management, intersectionality and leadership experienced by women from ethnic and cultural minorities in the UK educational context.
8. More studies testing the application of a combined case study and narrative enquiry method to identity construction will strengthen this methodology

9. More studies applying the innovative thematic, positioning and narrative analysis will advance the dilemmatic identity research.

6.6. THE IMPACT ON MY PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

This project is a culmination of my journey as a researcher, which started with an exploration of the gender identity of fictitious characters (Linaker, 2005) and progressed to identity studies of teachers and education leaders (Linaker, 2012, 2019, 2023a, 2023b, 2024a, 2024b). This journey has been a self-reflexive practice, a quest to answer the main question – “Who am I?” The Doctorate in Education at the University of Reading has helped me crystallise this question into a problem of general significance to female education leaders from minority backgrounds. This problem has gained further meaning and substance since I embarked on the current project, which aims to advance the knowledge of educational leadership and the dilemmatic nature of identity. The project has helped me understand identity as a state of continuous transformation of becoming different and remaining the same, belonging to the community and being unique, becoming agentive, yet constructed by external discourses (Bamberg, 2011).

The work on this thesis has allowed me to critically examine my own leadership and self-identity. My insider status and the case study design of the project allowed me to reflect on the experience of being a researcher, a participant, an observer and a contributor to the shared knowledge. I have been privileged to hear the participants’ frank, intimate and moving accounts of their journeys and observe the transformative actions their narratives ensued. Thus, some of them confessed to me that taking part in the project inspired them to be more proactive in seeking opportunities for professional growth, developing their research ideas and seeking fairer workload allocation for their colleagues.

For my part, the gift of recording such a polyphony of previously unheard voices has taught me to be more sensitive and caring as an educational leader and more nuanced, systematic and culturally aware as a researcher. The findings of the project have been disseminated through talks and publications and have been deemed impactful and inspirational by the community of educators in the area of foreign language teaching, intersectionality and inclusivity of leadership, equity in professional practice and curriculum decolonising.

This research has had the following practical implications for my professional practice. According to my recommendations regarding the Academic Education Pathway contract, the application process has been simplified, and mentoring support has been offered to those

with little scholarship experience. I am currently working on a proposal to improve the contractual conditions for the hourly-paid teachers in my department. As a result of my research into curriculum review with a decolonising agenda, my colleagues and I secured a Diversity and Inclusion grant for further action research in the area, engaging a student body. This thesis has had further impact on my academic practice and inspired me to launch a collaborative project with my colleagues to explore intercultural communication and conflict solving in a communal space of a language centre.

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APPENDIX A

Ethics approval, Information and Consent Form

Ethical Approval Form A (version November 2021)

Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that	YES	NO	N.A.
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	x		
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	x		
c) gives a full, fair, and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	x		
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	x		
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	x		
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention, and disposal	x		
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	x		
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	x		
i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email. If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included, and their name provided	x		
j) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants			x

k) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: “This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.”	x		
l) includes a standard statement regarding insurance:	x		

Please tick one:

Staff: ☐ PhD: ☐ EdD: ☒ Name of applicant(s): Tatiana Linaker

Title of project: The cultural gendered leadership identity construction of female leaders within the context of University-Wide Language Programme.

Name of supervisor (s) (for student projects): Daguo Li (1st supervisor), d.li@reading.ac.uk and Suzy Tutchell (2nd supervisor), s.tutchell@reading.ac.uk. P

Please complete the form below.

"The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request."			
Please answer the following questions:	YES	NO	N.A.
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).	x		
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to 1)?	x		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?		x	
4) Staff Only – Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/PeopleDevelopment/newstaff/humres-MandatoryOnlineCourses.aspx)			x
For all student projects, please tick N.A. and complete the Data Protection Declaration form (which is included in this document) and submit it with this application to the ethics committee.			
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form (included below with this ethics application)?	x		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	x		

7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?			x
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?			x
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?			x
10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data ¹ , or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?	x		
11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			x

¹ Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?		x	
12b) If the answer to question 12a is “yes”, does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?			x
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?	x		
13b) If the answer to question 13a is “yes”, please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.	x		
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		x	
14b. If the answer to question 14a is “yes”: My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University’s insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			x
If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below			

- Complete either **Section A** or **Section B** below with details of your research project.
- Complete a **Risk Assessment**.
- Sign the form in **Section C**.
- For all student projects, complete a **Data Protection Declaration form**.
- Attach evidence that you have completed information security training (e.g., screen shot/copy of certificate).
- Email the completed form, as a **SINGLE** document, to the Institute’s Ethics consideration.

Any missing information will result in the form being returned to

Section A: My research goes beyond the “accepted custom and practice of teaching”, but I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)	☒
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g., teachers, parents, pupils etc. There will be 10 participants – all Education leaders at UK Universities.	

Give a succinct description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments, and procedures) of the project in up to 500 words, noting:

1. Title of project

The cultural gendered leadership identity construction of female leaders within the context of University-Wide Language Programmes.

2. Purpose of the project and its academic rationale

- This thesis investigates problematic leadership experience and gendered identity construction of middle managers of Russian and Arabic ethnic origin in the context of the Institute-Wide Language Programmes (IWLP) of UK Universities.
- The purpose of this study is to address the gap in the knowledge of leadership development of female leaders from ethnically diverse backgrounds at the middle management level and identify the potential barriers to their career progression.

3. Brief description of methods and measurements

- The researcher will analyse the data gathered from unstructured interviews with ten participants to highlight their reflective moments and stories from their professional life through the intersection of their culture, ethnicity, and gender.
- The interviews will be conducted and recorded on Microsoft Teams. All the participants are fully bilingual in Russian and English or Arabic and English. The Russian-speaking participants will be offered the option to have an interview in Russian (as the present researcher is also a proficient bilingual in Russian and English).
- Each interview will last for 60 minutes, it will be unstructured, led by the interviewee and will start with a narrative-inducing question: "Tell me about your career".

4. Participants: Recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

Participants will be approached directly or through a personal introduction. The following criteria will be used in my sample selection: females of Arabic and Russian origin, who have had at least ten years long careers in UK higher education, middle managers in Language Centres or Institution Wide Language Programmes, who are coordinate bilinguals (i.e. fully proficient in both their native language and English).Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)

The participants will be provided with an information sheet and a consent form. They will also be offered to review the data transcription document.

6. A clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.

To comply with research ethical principles, I will ensure that no psychological, physiological, or emotional harm is caused to the participants. The participants will be offered anonymity, informed consent, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

To ensure full anonymity, I will remove all identifying details about the working credentials of the individuals and their institutions and will refer to the participants by their chosen pseudonyms (they choose pseudonyms themselves to allow for greater engagement with research process). In some instances, I will make slight changes to the titles of the individuals to create another layer of confidentiality.

I will treat all personal data with high sensitivity and will be conscious of my role as an insider researcher (i.e. being a researcher within my working community).

7. Estimated start date and duration of project 1.05.2024 until 1.02.2026

Section B: I consider that this project **may** have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee.

Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g., teachers, parents, pupils etc.

Give a succinct description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments, and procedures) of the project in up to 500 words.

1. Title of project

2. Purpose of project and its academic rationale

3. Brief description of methods and measurements

4. Participants: Recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

5. Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)

6. A clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.

7. Estimated start date and duration of project

RISK ASSESSMENT

Brief outline of Work/activity:	Doctorate of Education Research on Leadership Identity Construction
---------------------------------	---

Where will data be collected?	Data collection from 10 one hour long unstructured interviews with 10 participants
-------------------------------	--

Significant hazards:	none
----------------------	------

Who might be exposed to hazards?	No one
----------------------------------	--------

Existing control measures:	n/a
----------------------------	-----

Are risks adequately controlled?	n/a
----------------------------------	-----

If NO, list additional controls and actions required:	Additional controls	Action by:

Section C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT

Note: a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

Signed:

ker Date: 28.03.2024

Tanya Linaker

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed _____ Print Name: Anthony Zhang Date: 24/04/2024 (IoE Research
Ethics Committee representative) *

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters.

Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

Data Protection Declaration for Ethical Approval (PhD/EdD projects)

This document can be used to provide assurances to your ethics committee where confirmation of data protection training and awareness is required for ethical approval.

By signing this declaration, I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the requirements for data protection within the *Data Protection for Researchers* document located here:

<https://www.reading.ac.uk/imps/-/media/49b402bbe9a74ae59dd8f4f080652123.ashx>

- I have asked for advice on any elements that I am *unclear on* prior to submitting my ethics approval request, either from my supervisor, d.li@reading.ac.uk, or the data protection team at: imps@reading.ac.uk
- I understand that I am responsible for the secure handling, and protection of, my research data.

- I know who to contact in the event of an information security incident, a data protection complaint or a request made under data subject access rights.
- Data management plan is completed and attached below.

Researcher to complete

Project / Study Title: The cultural gendered leadership identity construction of female leaders within the context of University Wide Language Programmes.

NAME	STUDENT ID NUMBER	DATE
Tatiana Linaker		28.03.2024

Supervisor signature

Note for supervisors: Please verify that your student has completed the above actions

NAME	STAFF ID NUMBER	DATE
Dr Daguo Li		28.03.2024

Submit your completed signed copy along with the other documents pertaining to the ethics application.

Copies to be retained by ethics committee.

Version	Keeper	Reviewed	Approved by	Approval date
1.0	IMPS	Annually	IMPS	

Data Management Plan

Please complete all sections with reference to the *REC DMP Guidance* (download [here](#)).

Enter N/A if a section is not applicable.

PROJECT DETAILS	
PI name	Tatiana Linaker
Project Title	The cultural gendered leadership identity construction of female leaders within the context of University Wide Language Programmes.

Author(s) of DMP	Tatiana Linaker
Version	1.0
Date	19.04.2024
1. WHAT RESEARCH DATA WILL BE COLLECTED?	
Describe the types of research data that will be collected, providing information about media/formats data will be collected in, and the anticipated scale or quantity of each type of data.	
<i>Data will be collected via unstructured interviews, which will be recorded using Microsoft Teams' video recording function and subsequently transcribed. Data will be obtained from 10 participants. All completed and reviewed transcripts will be converted to PDF format. The interviews will last for 60 minutes and the video recordings will be stored in the Principal Investigator's personal account temporarily using Microsoft Teams' Stream function. After</i>	

the transcripts have been obtained, read, reviewed, and finalised, the Stream links containing the recordings will be deleted.

2. WHAT PERSONAL DATA AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION WILL BE PROCESSED?

2.1 Specify the identifying information (personal data) that will be collected (tick all that apply)

☒ **Name**

☐ **Data of Birth/Age**

☐ **Postal Address(es)** (to include postcodes)

☐ **Contact telephone(s)**

☒ **Email address(es)**

☐ **Unique Identifiers** (to include: Student ID numbers, Staff ID numbers, Passport numbers, NHS numbers, National Insurance numbers, ORCID's, unique research participant ID numbers, Unique applicant ID numbers, vehicle reg, driving licence numbers)

☐ **Images of individuals, including CCTV, photos**

☐ **Location Data** (to include any GPS location data)

☐ **Online Identifiers** (to include IP address data)

☐ **Economic/financial data** (relating to an identifiable individual)

☐ **Educational records** including but not limited to records held by the University and other education providers

☐ **Counselling records**

☐ **Pastoral records, including Extenuating Circumstances Forms**

☐ **Disciplinary records**

☐ **Training records**

☐ **Employment records to include CV's, references**

☐ **Criminal Convictions and offences** (to include alleged offences and convictions)

☐ **Other – Please specify below**

2.3 Specify any confidential information not specified above that will be collected, e.g. non-public information relating to a business or other organisation.

3. HOW WILL DATA BE STORED AND TRANSFERRED DURING THE PROJECT?

3.1 Identify all locations where data will be stored, indicating for each location whether it will be used to store identifying information or de-identified research data, and providing details of access controls that will be applied.

The recordings made via Microsoft Teams will be kept in the PI's personal Streams' account only for the period of transcribing. After the data has been transcribed and finalised, the recordings will be destroyed.

Interview data (PDF interview transcripts only) will be stored on an encrypted USB device. Once a participant has completed their participation, this data will be transferred onto the University of Reading OneDrive, labelled only with the participant identification number, and removed from the encrypted USB drive.

3.2 Describe any administrative measures that you will take to control the risks of inappropriate disclosure, e.g. pseudonymisation, and procedures for secure transfer between locations, e.g. using file encryption and encrypted channels.

The data from this study (PDF interview transcripts only) will be pseudonymised. Any direct or indirect identifiers in the data will be removed and replaced with a unique participant's identification number. Information linking the participant's name with the code will be known only to the PI. De-identified research data will be password-protected and stored on the University of Reading's OneDrive account. The researcher will only transfer de-identified research data to their work laptops/computers using a secured University network to conduct necessary analyses. Data derived from the study will be analysed in a fully pseudonymised format, and the link between participant and data will be destroyed at the end of the study.

3.3 Specify who will be able to access the identifying information and how you will ensure they process the information securely, e.g. through training, supervision and adherence to secure data handling procedures.

The only individual who will be able to access the data is the named researcher on the ethics application. The researcher will be the only member of the study team who will work with directly identifiable data, and the supervisors will only access data that has been allocated to a pseudonymised participant code.

4. HOW WILL RESEARCH DATA BE PRESERVED AND SHARED ON COMPLETION OF THE PROJECT? (UNDERGRADUATE OR PGT PROJECTS SHOULD ENTER N/A IN THIS SECTION UNLESS RESULTS WILL BE PUBLISHED)

4.1 Identify the research data that will be preserved and shared at the end of the project by deposit in a public data repository or other archiving solution.

The research data (PDF interview transcripts only) described in the Ethics Review Application Form will be preserved in an anonymised form and stored on One Drive.

4.2 Describe the measures that will be taken to ensure data are suitable for sharing, e.g. securing consent, anonymising data prior to deposit/sharing, sharing confidential or high-risk information using a controlled access repository.

All the data uploaded will be anonymised, without any identifiers, e.g., their unique participant ID code, name, and other identifiable data. The information in the consent form relating to this, is as follows: 'I understand that the data collected from me in this study may be preserved and made available in fully anonymised form (completely unidentifiable and without my participant identification code) so they can be consulted and re-used by others outside of the research team in the future.' The key 'file' linking IDs with participant names will be destroyed before publication of the data or sharing with other researchers ensuring the data becomes anonymous.

4.3 Identify data repositories or other solutions that will be used to preserve and share data.

University of Reading Research Data Archive: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/research-services/research-data-management/preserving-and-sharing-data/uor-research-data-archive>. Suitable for open data and restricted datasets (containing higher risk, anonymised or identifiable data).

5. HOW WILL RETENTION AND DISPOSAL OF PERSONAL DATA AND CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION AFTER PROJECT COMPLETION BE MANAGED?

5.1 State how long you plan to retain personal data/confidential information after the end of the project.
<i>Personal data/confidential information will be held after the end of the project for 5 years. After this, the PI will schedule regular reviews of personal data holdings to determine whether they need to be retained or can be safely destroyed.</i>
5.2 Specify under whose authority this information will be maintained and disposed of after the project.
<i>The information will be maintained and disposed of by the Principal Investigator, Tatiana Linaker</i>

Appendix 2

Information sheet for study participants

Research Project: The cultural gendered leadership identity construction of female leaders within the context of University-Wide Language Programme.

Project Team Members: Tatiana Linaker

Dear Colleague,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study I am undertaking.

What is the study?

- This project investigates problematic leadership experience and gendered identity construction of middle managers of Russian and Arabic ethnic origin in the context of the Institute-Wide Language Programme (IWLP) of UK Universities.
- The purpose of this study is to learn more about educational leadership through the prism of gender, ethnic and cultural diversity, and identify the potential barriers to the middle managers' career progression.
- The data will be gathered from ten participants through unstructured interviews centered around their leadership experience and reflections on the most salient moments of their career through the intersection of their personal and professional lives. Each interview will last for one hour.
- The interviews will be led by the participants and focus on the topics of career progression, education, family, ethnicity, cultural and gender issues.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

There will be no risks to your confidentiality as no information about your personal or institutional identity will be included in the data. Pseudonyms will be used to ensure full anonymity. The researcher will exercise a highly sensitive approach to any data which may potentially disclose your identities by obscuring or altering the relevant details without compromising the research validity.

The benefits of taking part in this study include the opportunity to contribute to the body of research on educational leadership and bring about transformative changes to career progression of ethnically and culturally diverse female educational leaders.

What will happen to the data?

Data will be collected via unstructured interviews, which will be recorded using Microsoft Teams' video recording function and subsequently transcribed. Data will be obtained from 10 participants. All completed and reviewed transcripts will be converted to PDF format. The video recordings will last for 60 minutes and will be stored in the researcher's personal account temporarily using Microsoft Teams' Stream function. After the transcripts have been obtained, read, reviewed, and finalised, the Stream links containing the recordings will be deleted.

The data from this study (PDF interview transcripts only) will be pseudonymised. Any direct or indirect identifiers in the data will be removed and replaced with a unique participant's identification

number. Information linking participant name with the code will be known only to the researcher. De-identified research data will be password-protected and stored on the University of Reading's OneDrive account. The researcher will only transfer de-identified research data to their work laptops/computers using secured University network to conduct necessary analyses. Data derived from the study will be analysed in a fully pseudonymised format and the link between participant and data will be destroyed at the end of the study.

The only individual who will be able to access the data is the named researcher on the ethics application. The researcher will be the only member who will work with directly identifiable data, and the supervisors will only access data that has been allocated to a pseudonymised participant code.

Personal data/confidential information will be held after the end of the project for 5 years. After this, the researcher will schedule regular reviews of personal data holdings to determine whether they need to be retained or can be safely destroyed.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can change your mind at any time without any repercussions. If you change your mind within two weeks after the data collection has ended, we will discard the data collected.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact Dr Daguo Li on d.li@reading.ac.uk

Where can I get more information?

t.linaker@pgr.reading.ac.uk

If you are happy to take part, please complete and return to t.linaker@pgr.reading.ac.uk the attached consent form.

Yours faithfully Tanya Linaker

data protection for information sheets

The organisation responsible for protection of your personal information is the University of Reading (the Data Controller). Queries regarding data protection and your rights should be directed to the University Data Protection Officer at imps@reading.ac.uk, or in writing to: Information Management & Policy Services, University of Reading, Whiteknights, P O Box 217, Reading, RG6 6AH.

The University of Reading collects, analyses, uses, shares, and retains personal data for the purposes of research in the public interest. Under data protection law, we are required to inform you that this use of the personal data we may hold about you is on the lawful basis of being a public task in the public interest and where it is necessary for scientific or historical research purposes. If you withdraw from a research study, which processes your personal data, dependant on the stage of withdrawal, we may still rely on this lawful basis to continue using your data if your withdrawal would be of significant detriment to the research study aims. We will always have in place appropriate safeguards to protect your personal data.

If we have included any additional requests for use of your data, for example adding you to a registration list for the purposes of inviting you to take part in future studies, this will be done only with your consent where you have provided it to us and should you wish to be removed from the register at a later date, you should contact Tanya Linaker Tel:

E-mail: tanya.linaker@kcl.ac.uk

You have certain rights under data protection law which are:

- Withdraw your consent, for example if you opted in to be added to a participant register
- Access your personal data or ask for a copy

- Rectify inaccuracies in personal data that we hold about you
- Be forgotten, that is your details to be removed from systems that we use to process your personal data
- Restrict uses of your data
- Object to uses of your data, for example retention after you have withdrawn from a study

Some restrictions apply to the above rights where data is collected and used for research purposes.

You can find out more about your rights on the website of the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) at <https://ico.org.uk>

You also have a right to complain to the ICO if you are unhappy with how your data has been handled. Please contact the University Data Protection Officer in the first instance.

Consent form for study participants

Research Project: The cultural gendered leadership identity construction of female leaders within the context of University-Wide Language Programme.

Please complete and return this form to: Tanya Linaker

1. I have read the information sheet about the project and received a ☐ copy of it.
2. I understand what the purpose of the study is and what is required of me. All my questions have been answered. ☐
3. I agree to the unstructured interview with the researcher on the topic of **“The cultural gendered leadership identity construction of female leaders within the context of University Wide Language Programme”**.
4. I understand that the data collected from me in this study may be preserved for 5 ☐ years and made available in a fully anonymised form (completely unidentifiable and without my participant identification code) so they can be consulted and reused by others outside of the research team in the future. ☐
5. I agree for the interview to be recorded via Microsoft Teams and for the PDF transcript to be stored confidentially in a non-shared University One Drive

Name: Signed: Date:

APPENDIX B

Jefferson Transcription System Symbols

Symbol	Description
--------	-------------

(.)	A micropause - a pause of no significant length.
-----	--

(0.7)	A timed pause - long enough to indicate a time.
-------	---

[]	Square brackets show where speech overlaps.
-----	---

> <	Arrows showing that the pace of speech has quickened.
-----	---

< >	Arrows showing that the pace of the speech has slowed down.
-----	---

()	Unclear section.
-----	------------------

Underlining Denotes a raise in volume or emphasis.

↑	Rise in intonation
---	--------------------

↓	Drop in intonation
---	--------------------

→	Entered by the analyst to show a sentence of particular interest. Not usually added by the transcriber.
---	---

CAPITALS	Louder or shouted words.
----------	--------------------------

(h)	Laughter in the conversation/speech.
-----	--------------------------------------

:::	Colons - indicate a stretched sound.
-----	--------------------------------------

_____	This symbol replaces the name or a place name for anonymity.
-------	--

Extract from Mona's Interview transcript

Thank you, Tanya, for including me in in this very interesting project. (.)

It's really interesting because it's a mixture between the personal and professional and sides of the ones rule, and it actually you are going to think about it, > <but actually you put me as a someone who is participating with you to think about it as well and to and decide what are what and to think what we're actually the most important points that you are drawing my attention to reflect is the word I'm looking for.

Mm-hmm.

His.

Yes.

Yes, yes.

So the reflection. (0.7)

So this specific story is how I ended up in this career, and it always makes me feel quite intrigued by how a career can choose you rather than you choosing a career. < >

Because when you choose a career, you go and you have different options and all these sort of things.

But when I ended up where I am right now, when I started at it, I was in a different line of management altogether.

I was working in the management field and it was totally different from the education as such, so it was international.

Mm-hmm.

Yes.

Yep.

So (.)when I arrived at to the UK back in the 90s end of 90s, early 2000s.

There I was at a loss and there was no such an opportunity to continue where I have left my career in the Middle East.

So suddenly the career of education has started to call me through people asking for someone to consider teaching at a university and that was in the area of (.)_____ where I owe them a lot.

Yeah.

And that was in _____University.

They looked at my CV and background and they thought that having been a languished and completed the Bachelor and later on a Masters in Linguistics and, (.)Umm, a translation, I could be the right person to replace someone who has disappeared suddenly on a short notice

Yes.

Mm-hmm

And this is the story of my life, ↑ actually. OK, replacing someone at your notice and it turns out to be a key factor in in what will come next and at that time.

Mm-hmm.

I was very reluctant and they have called me for a meeting to convince me that I'm the right person.

So in this way, that's why I'm saying my current career has chosen me rather than the other way around

Umm.

Yes, yes.

And that's the story I always cherish.

Because if you come across someone who would decide on, you would decide on you.

You become grateful and you try to fulfill and you try to, umm, do your best to be up to that expectation.

So that's how I started and I never look back because I never understood and I never realized that that's what I was actually best to fulfil the.

Mm-hmm

That's my starting and from then on there was a huge big.

Importance and a opportunities to fulfil and to complete what is required from me to do the job properly.

Yes.

Umm.

What were called at the time with the professional scaffolding (.)as regards the PGCE teaching diplomas, workshops to attend, taking into consideration the necessary feedback from and colleagues and most importantly, students, and this has helped me actually to understand the importance of feedback and its' its' not a paper that you just go through it and you take, it's actually a paper to reflect on and it's an educational statement, another

(.)allow me to say workshop in the form of a I in my opinion, you know the class was blah
blah blah, I suggest blah blah blah these are.