



ASSESSING WOMEN'S INTEGRATION INTO LEADERSHIP IN SUB-SAHARAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This study is undertaken to identify the hindrances of Digital financial products and services adoption and usage in Ethiopian banking. The integration of women in leadership positions in higher education institutions (HEIs) is a worldwide challenging phenomenon, while their remarkable contributions enhance the achievement of organizational goals. However, women's engagement in leadership positions is limited in HEI, despite various initiatives to promote it. Thus, this study examines the barriers and enablers of women's integration into leadership roles in HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The study used secondary information that was located online using keywords linked to women's integration into leadership roles in HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa. The search was performed systematically across databases: scientific journal articles, case studies, and numerous reports based on varied methodologies and situations are among the sources chosen. (Examples of databases: Google Scholar, EBSCO host, Web of Science, IEEE, and the ACM Digital Library). The findings revealed that in Sub-Saharan Africa, institutional, social, and personal barriers act as barriers to the integration of women into leadership roles in HEIs. On the other hand, mentoring, leadership development, networking, and gender mainstreaming facilitate women's integration into leadership roles in HEIs in SSA. The study is significant because the conclusions help policymakers and other worldwide stakeholders in their discussions about achieving gender equality in career development, noting down the obstacles and developing enabling policies.

Keywords:

Women's Leadership, Higher Education, Sub-Saharan Africa, Gender Equity, Academic Leadership

1. Introduction

Women's integration into leadership positions in HEIs is a global challenge, while they have greater capabilities to improve and modernize the educational system (Nakitende, 2019). Women are typically supportive, democratic, and communicative, which results in a variety of leadership styles to improve the achievement of institutional goals (Elias, 2018). Numerous programs are in place to increase women's integration into a variety of global and continental activities because of their significance in society (Idahosa, 2021). For instance, the African Agenda 2063 and the fifth Sustainable Development Goal both emphasize gender equality and women's empowerment (AU, 2015; UNDP, n.d). However, empirical data reveal the under-representation of women, specifically in top leadership roles in higher education institutes (Idahosa, 2021; Shava and Chasokela, 2020; O'Connor, 2019).

Numerous studies (Robinson et al., 2017; O'Connor, 2020) have been conducted in numerous locations throughout the world as a result of the recognition of the significance of women in leadership roles. For instance, just 36% of women are in leadership roles, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF) data from 2020. In a similar vein, Robinson et al. (2017) discovered that there aren't many women in leadership positions in American education. According to research by O'Connor (2020), 86% of senior leaders in higher education institutions in the EU and Western nations are men. On the other hand, it is held that leaders have authority, and when women are excluded from leadership roles in organizations, they lose the ability to change their countries and the wider world (Hill et al., 2016). Engaging women in leadership positions can assist higher education institutions and enhance the nation's

socioeconomic situation because of their experience and skill contributions (Maheshwari and Nayak, 2020). Nations must therefore increase the number of prominent jobs in industry and academia that are open to women.

The literature review also outlined some of the factors that limit women's integration into leadership roles in academia. For instance, according to Mabokela and Mlambo (2017), fewer women are pursuing doctorates, conducting research, and teaching, which lowers the pool of future academic leaders. Similar obstacles include social and cultural ones (Shava and Chasokela, 2020; Sougou et al., 2022), and there is a lack of transparency in hiring, promoting, and keeping employees (White and Burkinshaw, 2019). There is still a gap in the African context, notwithstanding the factors mentioned in prior research that restrict women's integration into leadership to senior positions in higher education. In a review of the literature, researchers (Maheshwari et al., 2021) highlighted that there is insufficient information about women's integration into leadership roles in higher education, especially in Africa. As a result, this study used existing literature to assess women's integration into leadership roles within Higher Education Institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. It specifically examined the extent and effectiveness of integrating women into leadership roles within HEIs in SSA; identified key factors that facilitate or hinder women's integration into leadership roles; and proposed strategies to enhance gender equity in academic leadership.

The assessment addressed the subsequent precise research questions:

- i. What is the current extent of women's representation in leadership roles within higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, and how effective are these institutions in promoting gender equity in these positions?
- ii. What are the key factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of women into leadership roles in higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa?
- iii. What strategies can be proposed to improve gender equity in academic leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa?

2. Examining the Literature on Women's Integration into Leadership Roles within Higher Education Institutions Worldwide

Table 1: Lists of factors that facilitate or hinder women's integration into leadership roles within higher education institutions in general

Authors	Countries	Findings
Shava and Chasokela (2020)	Zimbabwe	The researchers discovered that women's access to leadership positions at higher education institutions is still hampered by cultural and societal hurdles. They also claimed that organizational design, family styles, and cultural norms all hinder women from advancing to top management roles.
Nyoni and He (2019)	Tanzania	According to the study's findings, several obstacles prohibit women from advancing to senior leadership roles in academia, including personal, organizational, and social ones. In addition, gender mainstreaming can minimize gender disparities by changing cultural norms, procedures, and reporting systems.
Mulyampiti (2016)	Uganda	According to the findings, women have some soft skills that are particular to the workplace and have a tremendous potential to influence an organization's success. In some circumstances, women outperform men, but they do not receive pay or managerial positions commensurate with their greater levels of performance. Women's job pathways also encounter obstacles like prejudice and demand more effort to accomplish the same goals than men. Last but not least, mentoring is crucial to the career paths of academics as the majority of the women who were interviewed had female mentors and just a tiny fraction had successful male mentors.
Sougou, et al. (2022)	Ghana, Senegal,	The findings identified four barriers that prevent many women from achieving leadership positions in academia, including family and environmental issues, institutional policies and organizational cultures that are insensitive to gender, the

Authors	Countries	Findings
	Burkina Faso, Niger & Mali	need for women in research, and individual perceptions of professional and personal success that are intermediate.
Moodly and Toni (2019)	South Africa	The findings show that patriarchal systems silence women's voices and male networking patterns, creating a culture of exclusion for women leaders in academia. To increase women's access to administrative and academic leadership positions, the study suggested expanded leadership programs, mentorship initiatives, and support networks.
Eboiyehi et al. (2016)	Nigeria	The findings revealed that women were underrepresented (29.2%) relative to men (70.8%) in top leadership roles at particular universities. A lack of competent women (42.6%), patriarchy (14.9%), domestic and family obligations (10.6%), sociocultural views that leadership is a man's domain (9.6%), a lack of support and encouragement (8.5%), a lack of leadership abilities (7.5%), and insufficient mentoring (2.1%) were all highlighted as hurdles.
Fazal et al. (2019)	Pakistan	The study found that parental, sibling, and spousal support was inspiring female academics in Pakistan. On the other hand, impediments to leadership roles in academia were found to include unequal opportunities in a male-dominated environment, managing family and work commitments, and a lack of workplace amenities.
Gandhi and Sen (2021)	India	The results showed that traditional socio-cultural expectations of women as well as a lack of vision, policies, and practices to support female leadership are the main barriers to women's entry to leadership in Indian universities. The study suggests the following enablers to increase women's access to leadership in academia: creating a network of professional mentors, female leaders, and programs that build capacity; creating an institutional vision and organizational culture of diversity and inclusion; and leveraging women's careers by family and society by cultivating sensitivity toward diversity and inclusion.
Maheshwari (2021)	Australia Canada New Zealand UK USA Vietnam	The analysis found that few studies had been conducted in Asia, specifically six studies in Vietnam, and that the majority of the research on women's leadership at HEIs had been conducted in industrialized nations like the US and Canada. However, family support appears to be the enabler in developing, and mentor support is proven to be an enabler in developed nations. On the other hand, the barriers experienced by women leaders are the same in both developed and developing countries.

3. Methodology

This article examines the integration of women into leadership positions in academia, with an emphasis on higher education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa, using a literature review. Sub-Saharan Africa was chosen since there may be different obstacles and difficulties for women there than in Eastern and Western nations. The researchers developed the inclusion and exclusion standards for selecting publications.

3.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The research was limited to women's leadership and research documents written in English, and they were excluded. Types of literature were associated with higher education institutions operating in African countries, particularly in the sub-Saharan region. In addition, the study was limited to ten (10) years (2014-2024) as this is the most common period for Mapunda (2021) to apply the same approach.

3.2. Data Sources

The main source of data for this study was scholarly articles retrieved through the following search engines: Google Scholar, Google Search Engine, Sage Publications, Emerald Insights, Taylor and Francis, Wiley Online, Science Direct, Dissertations Reports, and Conference Proceedings.

3.3. Sample Size and Study Variables

The study sample of 10 countries (21.7%) from 46 sub-Saharan countries is one population. The smaller sample size is due to the limited studies that have been conducted in the region, as evidenced by several scholars (Maheshwari et al., 2021; Nyoni and He, 2019). Furthermore, the study variables were selected from the literature reviewed, based on the results of the study, i.e., barriers, challenges, and enablers.

3.4. Search Keywords

The study used the following keywords to research women's access to leadership positions in academia. “Women leadership” AND “higher education” AND “barriers” OR “challenges” AND “enablers” OR “motivators” OR “facilitators” AND “Africa” OR “Sub-Saharan Africa” and individual countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi, just a few to mention.

3.5. Data Analysis

The research papers chosen were classified according to the country of research. It was found that out of 74 empirical studies conducted on the theme of women's access to senior positions in academia. 23 studies have been done in the United States and Canada. 13 studies were carried out in Australia and New Zealand, and 14 in Europe and the United Kingdom. 14 studies have taken place in Asia. The remaining 10 studies were conducted within the context of sub-Saharan Africa. On the other hand, it was observed that out of 74 articles on the subject up to July 2022, there were only 10 studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa. This may be due to the changing cultural, economic, and political circumstances discussed later in the document. The previous discussion on data extraction stages explained that only 28 documents (Table 1) were used to address barriers and facilitators from the ten countries in this study.

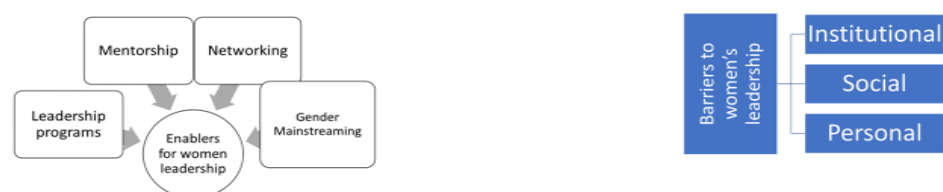


Figure 1. Enablers and Barriers to women's leadership in higher education institutions

4. Results and Discussion

Although literature from both developed and developing countries on women's integration into leadership roles within higher education institutions was evaluated, the study's conclusions concentrated on ten Sub-Saharan countries. The main findings were divided into categories based on two research questions:

4.1. What is the current extent of women's representation in leadership roles within higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, and how effective are these institutions in promoting gender equity in these positions?

4.1.1. Women's representation in leadership roles within higher education institutions in SSA

Although there has been some progress in increasing women's representation in leadership roles within higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, women are still significantly underrepresented in these positions (Okonta and Nkedishu, 2024; Idahosa, 2021; O'Connor, 2020). A 2020 UNESCO report indicates that women hold less than 10% of vice-chancellor roles in universities across the region. This underrepresentation extends to other top leadership positions such as vice-chancellors, presidents, and deans (UNESCO, 2020). In South Africa, a report by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) revealed that while women constitute 45% of the overall academic staff, they only account for 29% of senior management positions in universities (CHE, 2021). To address this issue, higher education institutions should continuously interpret research findings for policymakers and other stakeholders to inform and drive necessary policy changes.

4.1.2. The effectiveness of Higher Education institutions in promoting gender equity

The effectiveness of higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa in promoting gender equity in leadership positions varies significantly across the region. Many institutions are developing and implementing gender equity policies and frameworks. For example, the African Union's Gender Policy (2019) and the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development stress the importance of gender equality in education and leadership roles. Similarly, programs such as the Female Academic Leaders Fellowship Program (FALFP) in Nigeria are designed to enhance the leadership skills of female academics (OAU, 2021). Despite some positive progress, numerous challenges and limitations persist. Recent studies and reports highlight that the effectiveness of these initiatives is hindered by cultural, structural, and institutional barriers. Continued commitment, resource allocation, and rigorous enforcement of gender equity policies are crucial for achieving significant progress (Okonta and Nkedishu, 2024; Idahosa, 2021).

4.2. What are the key factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of women into leadership roles in higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, and what strategies can be proposed to improve gender equity in academic leadership?

Table 2: Summarizes key factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of women into leadership roles within HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa

Country	Barriers	Enablers
Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Cultural and social barriers; ✓ organizational structure; ✓ Parenthood; ✓ culture 	
Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ individual, ✓ administrative and, ✓ societal factors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ gender mainstreaming is the system that can be used to enable reducing gender differences

Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ discrimination, ✓ often subtle but not always, ✓ the requirement for higher input of energy than their male counterparts to achieve the same goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ mentoring is critical in the career paths of female professors,
Ghana, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger & Mali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ family and environmental related; ✓ gender insensitive organizational culture and institutional policies; ✓ the need for women in the research; ✓ individual intermediate perception of professional and personal success. 	
South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ culture of exclusion since the system is patriarchal, ✓ silencing women's voices and ✓ male patterns of networking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ mentoring programs, ✓ support networks, and ✓ extended leadership programs
Nigeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ inadequate numbers of qualified women ✓ patriarchy ✓ domestic and family demands ✓ socio-cultural beliefs that leadership is the prerogative of men ✓ lack of encouragement and support ✓ lack of leadership skills and ✓ poor mentorship 	

4.2.1. Factors Hindering Women's integration into leadership roles in HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa.

There is consensus among the researchers (Liani et al., 2020; Maheshwari et al., 2021) that women have limited access to leadership in higher education institutions in comparison to men in African countries, especially in the sub-Saharan region. According to the literature reviewed (see Table 2), barriers to women entering academic leadership positions have been classified as institutional, social, and personal (Mushi et al., 2021).

4.2.1.1. Institutional Barriers

These internal organizational barriers, which are brought on by a male-dominated leadership culture, are meant to discourage women from taking on leadership positions (Maheshwari, 2021). Organizational structure, corporate culture, and institutional policies are examples of institutional impediments. This study's findings revealed that organizational structure, gender-sensitive organizational culture, institutional policies, patriarchy, and inadequate mentoring were the barriers preventing women's integration into leadership roles within HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings are consistent with those of Mate, McDonald, and Do (2019), who found that in the Vietnamese setting, male-dominated organizational structures prevent women from achieving leadership roles. The results are consistent with those of Gandhi and Sen (2021), who found that organizational culture and a lack of policies were hurdles to women being able to hold leadership roles at Indian universities.

4.2.1.2. Social Barriers

Cultural and social barriers include a lack of encouragement, networking patterns, social-cultural views, sexism, a culture of exclusion of women, and discrimination (Nyoni and He, 2019; Shava and Chasokela, 2020; Eboiyehi et al., 2016). This study discovered that in Sub-Saharan Africa, socio-cultural barriers prevent women from achieving leadership roles. The results are comparable to those of Mate et al. (2019), who suggested that socio-cultural factors were one of the factors preventing women in Vietnam from advancing their careers in leadership roles. Similar to how Gandhi and Sen (2021) highlighted socio-cultural impediments preventing women from obtaining leadership roles in Indian universities.

4.2.1.3. Personal Barriers

Personal obstacles are elements that limit a woman's career progression toward a leadership or management position (Maheshwari, 2021). Examples of personal barriers include individual administrative (Nyoni and He, 2019); familial and environmental, the need for research, an individual's intermediate perception of professional and personal success (Sougou et al., 2022); a lack of qualified women, domestic and family obligations, and a lack of leadership skills (Eboiyehi et al., 2016). This study's findings indicate that women in Sub-Saharan Africa have personal obstacles that prevent them from achieving leadership positions. The results concur with those of Nyoni et al. (2017), who found that, in the Tanzanian context, personal obstacles are among those impeding women's integration into leadership roles. The results are also in line with those of Sougou et al. (2022), who found that women's access to leadership positions in higher education institutions in the setting of West Africa is hampered by their intermediate perceptions of professional and personal achievement.

4.2.2. Factors Facilitating Women's integration into leadership roles in HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The studied kinds of literature also identified factors, such as gender mainstreaming in the system, mentorship programs, support networks, and extended leadership programs, that facilitate women's integration into leadership positions in academia in Sub-Saharan nations. Due to the paucity of studies in this field, there are fewer facilitators than barriers identified for women's integration into senior positions in academia. Research on factors that can make it easier for women to obtain leadership roles in higher education institutions in developing nations, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is lacking, as Maheshwari discovered in his study.

4.2.2.1. Leadership Programs

A leadership program is a professional development activity that takes the shape of seminars, training courses, or other capacity-building training in higher education institutions (Abalkhail, 2017). According to this study, it facilitates women's access to leadership roles. The conclusions are in line with those made by Gandhi and Sen (2021), who suggested that the creation of professional mentors and capacity-building initiatives could open up leadership positions for women in higher education institutions in the Indian context. Similarly to this, Mushi et al. (2021) proposed increasing women's access to leadership roles in Tanzanian higher education institutions through capacity building in training programs. Furthermore, Nakitende's (2019) findings supported the notion that one of the driving forces facilitating women's integration into leadership positions in the US environment was leadership training.

4.2.2.2. Mentoring Programs and Support Networks, and Gender Mainstream

Women who participate in mentoring programs learn how to overcome obstacles, which helps them build new relationships both inside and outside of the company and broadens their network (Maheshwari, 2021). This study found that mentoring programs and support networks are among the enabling factors facilitating women's integration into leadership roles within HEIs in Sub-Saharan Africa. The findings are in line with those of Mate et al. (2019), who discovered that professional networking and mentorship boost women's access to leadership in Australia. Similarly, Nakitende (2019) discovered that networking and mentorship helped women achieve leadership roles in the USA. Furthermore, the results are consistent with those of Moodly and Toni (2019), who identified networking and mentoring as driving factors facilitating women's access to leadership roles in the USA setting.

Gender mainstreaming is an effort to include gender equality into an organization's structure, policy, procedure, and practice, which may include the curriculum and research initiatives, according to O'Connor (2019). This study found that gender mainstreaming is one of the factors that may be utilized to lessen gender inequality and, as a result, improve women's integration into leadership roles within higher education in the Sub-Saharan area. The findings are

similar to those of Nyoni and He (2019), who advocate that to eliminate gender disparity and improve women's access to leadership positions in higher education institutions, gender mainstreaming should be incorporated into the Tanzanian system. The results also line up with those of O'Connor (2019), who highlighted gender mainstreaming as an enabler facilitating women's entry to leadership positions in higher education in European contexts.

4.2.3. Strategies Proposed to improve gender equity in academic leadership in SSA

Several scholars (Prozesky and Mouton, 2019; Idahosa, 2021; O'Connor, 2019) identified different strategies to improve gender equity in academia. These include: policy implementation and enforcement, capacity building and networking, institutional support, and collaboration. In short, these strategies are the facilitating factors that enable women's integration into the leadership role.

5. Conclusion and Study Implications

The purpose of this paper was to assess women's integration into leadership roles within Higher Education Institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. The study used the following research questions: What are the key factors that facilitate or hinder the integration of women into leadership roles in higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa, and what strategies can be proposed to improve gender equity in academic leadership?

The study's findings showed that in sub-Saharan Africa, institutional, social, and personal barriers prevent women from achieving leadership roles in higher education. In the same vein, mentoring, leadership training, networking, and gender mainstreaming facilitate women's integration into leadership roles within higher education in Sub-Saharan.

The study implies that policymakers in Sub-Saharan Africa need to collaborate with women studying in higher education institutions to develop rules and structures that would uphold and protect their rights in a workplace dominated by men. Higher education institutions also need to provide improved facilities that would enable women to focus more effectively on academic activities, including research, teaching, as well as professional development through mentoring and networking.

6. Study Limitations and Area For Future Research

The paper was limited to a scoping review of women's access to leadership positions in higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa; it is not based on a systematic review or empirical research. Therefore, it is challenging to determine the validity and reliability of the data. Therefore, to generalize the results, future studies should look at empirical or systematic reviews of the same subject, preferably quantitatively.

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