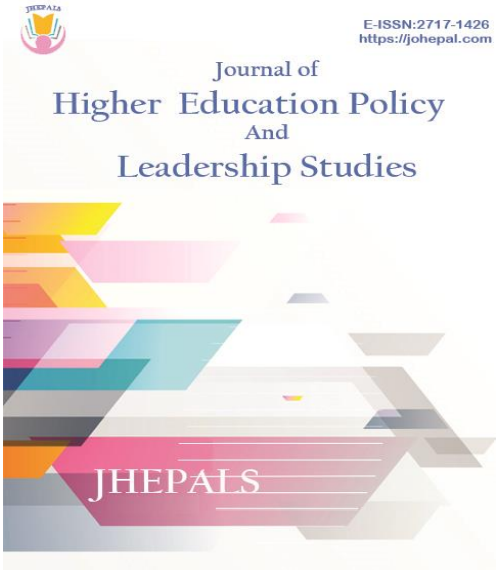
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Integrating African Women Academics in Leadership: A Systematic Review



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Abstract

Gender inequality is a global issue which has been a clog in the wheel of women academics' career fulfilment, particularly in African continent. This paper, therefore, is a systematic review of relevant literature on the challenges and strategies of integrating African women academics in leadership positions. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) protocol, relevant qualitative and quantitative articles were documented following the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The authors used four databases (Emerald insight, Dimension, Google scholar, and science direct) to search for articles published in English between the year 2019 and 2023 on African women in leadership. Studies that focused on women academics in leadership in other continents were excluded. Thematic analysis was used to map the findings. It was found among other things that cultural and societal stereotypes were major challenges. The study also thematized coping strategies to integrate African women academics in the leadership in various higher education institutions. The outcome of this review will be a working tool for policy makers, higher education institutions and women in general with a special attention on those in academia.

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Keywords: African Women; Leadership; Mentoring; Higher Education Institutions; Gender Equality

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Introduction

Gender inequality is a major issue facing many countries, particularly in African continent (Moodley et al., 2019), where women's participation in academic leadership roles is limited. Despite their substantial achievement in education and other fields of life (Nyoni & He, 2019), increase in enrolment by 9% between year 2011 and year 2020 (Mulwa, 2021) efforts to address this imbalance, the representation of women in academic leadership positions still is disproportionately low. Despite global advocacy for gender parity (Nyoni & He, 2019), Women continue to face many challenges in their quest for leadership positions in academia, including gender bias, limited access to resources and networks, cultural cum societal barriers. The traditional practices in African has also been identified as enhancer of socio-political disparities among genders in the higher institutions in Africa (Potokri & Perumal, 2019). Women representation is exceptionally low in virtually all the sectors with education sector suffering the most (Bergmann et al., 2022). In the study conducted by Education sub–Saharan Africa (ESSA) in Ghana recently, it was revealed that only 8% are female professors in public universities in the country (Mulwa, 2021). Similarly, another report from United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) showed that only 24% of female are academic personnel in tertiary educational institutions across Sub Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2020).

To address this issue, there is a need for comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to women's underrepresentation in academic leadership positions. A systematic review of existing literature in this area of study can supply valuable insights into the challenges facing women in academia, as well as identify strategies and interventions that can be implemented to promote gender equity and support women's advancement in leadership role in the African citadel of learning.

Interest of different stakeholders have increased in the issue of women leadership in recent time (Poltera, 2019) especially researchers. Nyoni and He (2019) reiterated that abundance of talents (administrative and technical) of women in academic are being wasted in higher institutions. Studies have shown that if something meaningful could be done to arrest this ridiculous underrepresentation of women in the academics, the teaching and learning activities will improve (Bergmann et al., 2022). The two international agenda (the agenda 2030 and the African Union Agenda 2063) have emphasized the role of gender equality in promoting sustainable development (Mulwa, 2021) in all spheres of life, including education.

Statement of the Problem

Earlier studies (Harris, 2019; Potokri & Perumal, 2019; Laver et al., 2018) have focused attention on gender disparity in leadership positions among academia in citadel of learning. There have been quantitative, qualitative, mixed studies and systematic reviews on gender inequality. For instance, Casad et al. (2021) found that academic climate for women is chilly laced with bias and harassment. Similarly, women are usually multitasked and overburdened as they function as caregivers shouldering increased domestic works plus their assignments in their places of work (Landivar et al., 2020) but not well represented in leadership positions (Evans & Pfister, 2021). A systematic review on the kind of intervention programmes that can be embarked upon to support female in academic medicine is also a significant

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reference (Laver et al., 2018). This review will examine existing research on barriers and facilitators of women's participation in academic leadership in Africa. The experiences and perspectives of African women in academia will be explored, to show the strategies and interventions that have been used to promote their participation in leadership positions. Overall, this systematic review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the factors that contribute to women's underrepresentation in academic leadership in Africa and show evidence-based strategies and interventions that can be used to promote gender equity and support women's advancement in leadership positions especially in the fourth industrial revolution.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the barriers that African women face in pursuing academic leadership position in Africa?
2. identify strategies that can be implemented to integrate women in academic leadership positions in other continents.

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the barriers that African women face in pursuing academic leadership position in Africa?
2. What strategies can be implemented to integrate women in academic leadership positions?

Significance of the Study

The study's significance lies in its focus on addressing the gender disparities that persist in leadership roles within African academia. It acknowledges the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and aims to provide insights into how this issue can be addressed effectively. By fostering the leadership potential of African women within academic institutions, the study contributes to empowering women not only in their individual careers but also in their ability to influence educational policies and practices. Education is a fundamental driver of societal progress. Similarly, a diverse leadership team, including more women, brings a wider range of perspectives and ideas. By facilitating the integration of African women into leadership roles, the study promotes diversity and inclusion in academia, enriching the decision-making processes and fostering a more representative and equitable academic environment.

Leadership roles often come with opportunities to shape research agendas and institutional policies. The study's significance extends to its potential to influence the direction of research and knowledge production within African academic institutions, leading to research that better reflects the needs and concerns of diverse populations.

Investigating the pathways to leadership for African women in academia can also shed light on the role of mentorship, networking, and professional development opportunities. This knowledge can benefit not only aspiring female leaders but also academic institutions seeking to create supportive career advancement programs. Gender equality in leadership can contribute to academic excellence by ensuring that the most talented individuals,

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regardless of their gender, have the opportunity to guide and lead educational institutions. This can ultimately result in improved teaching, research, and community engagement.

The findings of the study can have important policy implications for African governments and educational institutions. It can inform the development of policies and strategies aimed at promoting gender equity in academic leadership, thus contributing to broader societal goals of gender equality. The study can serve as a source of inspiration for current and future generations of African women in academia. By showcasing success stories and best practices, it can encourage women to aspire to leadership positions and provide them with role models to emulate.

Status of Female Academia in Higher Institutions in Africa

Gender disparity has been a household name to the ears of all globally. Efforts made by women in academic to overcome the inequality has not yielded enviable results. This disparity has caused occupational segregation in many sectors including education (Mulwa, 2021). Since there has been reported cases of unequal access to university education and ridiculously small number of female professors or in senior cadres in higher educational institution, it is difficult to get women represented in leadership positions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been identified as a new obstacle to women ascending the throne of leadership (Ellis, 2020). Women were mostly affected by the pandemic, the number of women who lost their jobs increased, and more female students' attrition in higher education institutions increased. In recent time, women are now enrolling more in higher institutions of learning, with the intention of breaking the barriers to reaching leadership position. Unfortunately, the higher they go, the more they are cut off in dozens (Mwakitalu et al., 2018) due to attrition owing to lack of support and recognition. The societal belief also hinders the representation of female academics in leadership positions. The African societies have some defined roles for the two genders (Mbepera, 2015). The society belief system is that the roles of women are in the house because they are the mothers and home keepers while fathers are seen to be stronger, and so they are the bread winners and leaders by nature.

In a study conducted in Tanzania, it was found that lack of higher qualification on the part of women academia contributes to their underrepresentation in leadership positions (Mwakitalu et al., 2018). The erroneous belief of some men about capability and competency of women occupying leadership positions is another common challenge. Harris (2019) found that because of the belief and expression of female coworkers that women are less capable and competent in occupying management position due to their physical appearances, some women may decide not to pursue leadership positions,

Studies have also affirmed that lack of mentors and role model is another challenging factor to women in academics (Mbepera, 2015; Ngwira & Potokri, 2019). Nyoni and He (2019) submit that African women who can strive to get to senior cadre will make a significant impact.

> "Africa could add $316 billion or 10 percent to GDP in the period to 2025 if each country makes advances in women's equality to match the country in the region that has achieved the most progress towards parity. Today, however, this "best-in-region" scenario seems a distant possibility. At the current rate of progress,

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> Africa could take more than 140 years to achieve gender parity." (Moodley et al., 2019: vi).

Strategies for Integrating Female Academia in Leadership positions in Higher Institutions in Africa

The capability of every woman should not be underestimated in every society. They must be allowed to contribute their own quotas to societal development. Women as described by Melinda Gate should not be profiled as mere victim of broken world but one that can design a better one (Ellis, 2020). The millennium development goals of the United Nations were instituted to promote gender equality as part of its focus (Nyoni & He, 2019) and the sustainable development goals.

Facilitating mentoring and networking opportunities for women within the context of higher education institutions can play a pivotal role in nurturing and amplifying the leadership potential of women academics. As highlighted in the recent report by Education Sub-Saharan Africa in 2023 (Education Sub-Saharan Africa, 2023), these initiatives are essential components of fostering gender equity and leadership diversity within academia. Mentorship programs provide women with invaluable guidance, support, and access to knowledge and experiences that can empower them to navigate the often complex academic landscape effectively. Additionally, networking opportunities allow women to establish meaningful connections with peers, mentors, and leaders, enabling them to tap into a diverse range of perspectives and resources. By investing in mentoring and networking initiatives, higher education institutions can contribute significantly to the growth and development of a more inclusive and dynamic academic leadership landscape where women can thrive and contribute their unique talents and perspectives.

Self-advocacy may help female to advance in their respective careers. This is a special skill that allow women to speak up for themselves (Harris, 2019) and be liberated. While it may come naturally to some, self-advocacy can be a delicate and challenging endeavour for many women, particularly in environments where gender bias and unequal power dynamics persist. Therefore, specialized training and mentoring programs tailored to women's unique experiences and challenges are essential. Such initiatives can provide women with the tools, confidence, and strategies needed to navigate complex workplace scenarios, negotiate for fair compensation, seek career advancement opportunities, and confront issues like workplace discrimination or bias. Ultimately, fostering self-advocacy among women is a key step towards creating a more equitable and empowering work environment where women can fully realize their potential and contribute to their fields without constraint.

The challenge of combining academic assignment with the administrative responsibilities may be a great hindrance to women academics to be involved in the leadership. To manage this challenge, Ngwira and Potokri (2019) recommended in the study conducted on the induction of women beginner teachers in south African schools, that continuous mentoring programme for female teachers and peer support will be efficacious. In addendum, Adewale and Adebayo (2020) assert that mentoring programme will be a good means of creating a network of professional and as well bring them together for individual and professional development.

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Research Methodology

The Review Protocol

This systematic review of barriers and strategies of integrating African women in academics in leadership positions in citadel of learning will be guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines. The PRISMA statement, introduced in 2009, is a reporting guideline specifically created to improve the quality of reporting in systematic reviews (Moher et al., 2009). This statement includes a checklist of 27 essential items that are recommended for inclusion in systematic review reports. The rationale for the choice of PRISMA is that it helps the reviewer to aggregate various datasets from various sources to examine a problem and come up with a new way to solve the problem (Anuar et al., 2022). PRISMA is considered in this study because it given an allowance for assessment of possible publication biases (Moher et al., 2009). Hence, we started with record identification through database search. The databases that were searched included science direct, Dimension, Google scholar and emerald insight. The search for articles in the databases were limited to articles published in English from year 2019 to year 2023. The inclusion criteria were limited to empirical studies that focus on African women in academic leadership positions published within the year under review. Thematic analysis approach was also used to extract data and synthesis the findings.

Search Strategy

Relevant keywords, Boolean operators, and search filters were developed to capture a wider range of relevant studies. The search terms used in this study include “African women” “academics” “leadership,” “gender,” “equality,”” education,” and “empowerment.” The search was therefore conducted using three different databases and a search strategy. The researcher kept the record of the search terms and the number of results obtained from each of the databases with the aid of PRISMA flow chart.

Screening the Results

After conducting the search, the screening of the results was done by reviewing the titles and abstracts of the studies obtained. The screening process helps to review the full articles in the final stage (Anuar et al., 2022). The screening was done according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria set for the review. Thereafter, studies that are not relevant to the research questions were excluded.

Table 1.
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Timeline	2019 – March 2023	Before 2019
Document Type	Journal Articles	Conference proceedings, books, book chapters, reviews, book series
Language	English	Non-English journal articles

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in this systematic literature review. These criteria play a pivotal role in shaping the study's

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scope and ensuring the inclusion of only pertinent materials. The timeline for inclusion encompasses documents published from January 2019 to March 2023 while excluding any published before 2019. In terms of document type, the study exclusively considers journal articles, recognized as authoritative sources of peer-reviewed research. Conversely, it excludes conference proceedings, books, book chapters, reviews, and book series. Lastly, language inclusion mandates that documents must be in English, while non-English journal articles are expressly excluded to maintain a focus on English-language literature. These criteria collectively guide the selection and evaluation of materials, ensuring the study's precision and relevance.

Quality Evaluation

The study adopted criteria which include study design, sample size, and validity of the results to figure out the level of evidence provided by each study. By assessing study quality, systematic reviews aim to minimize the inclusion of biased or poorly conducted studies. This helps maintain the integrity of the review's findings. Systematic reviews often assign more weight to studies with higher quality scores. This means that the results of high-quality studies have a stronger influence on the overall conclusions of the review. Evaluating study quality adds transparency to the systematic review process. Readers can understand how the review authors determined the reliability of the evidence they considered. High-quality studies contribute to more robust and trustworthy conclusions in systematic reviews, enhancing their value as resources for evidence-based decision-making in various fields.

Eligibility

The eligible journal articles are those that have met the inclusion and exclusion criteria earlier stated. It must also address the issue of women in leadership positions or women in managerial positions, with preference for women in academic. In addition, the study must have used any qualitative, quantitative, or mixed study approaches. Hence, studies with approaches different from the three are excluded. Besides, it must have been peer reviewed and published in reputable journals. This systematic review has therefore included 13 eligible studies as mentioned in the PRISMA flow chart.

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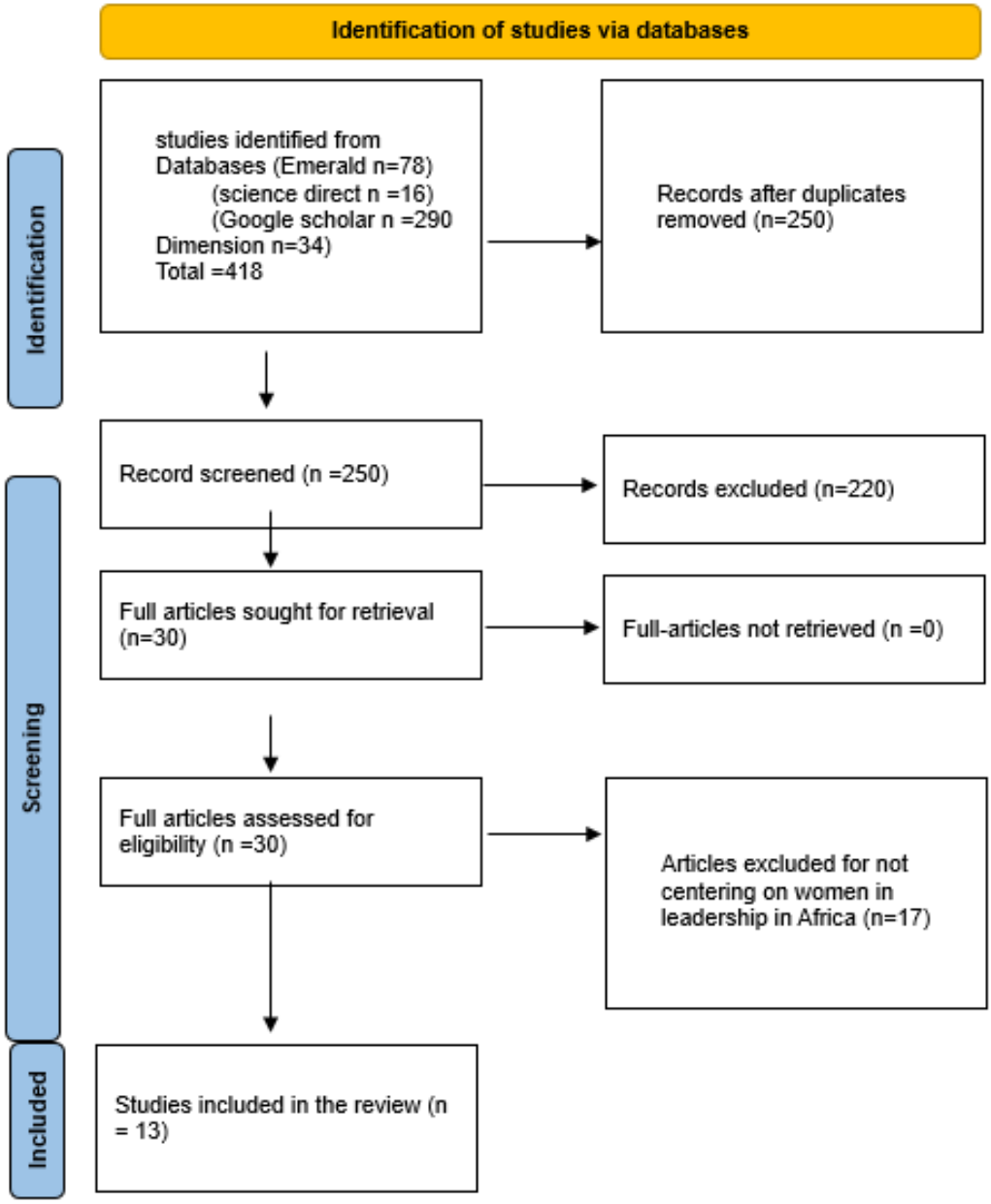


Figure 1. PRISMA protocol (Adapted from Page et al., 2021)

Figure 1 illustrates the comprehensive analysis of the database search, detailing its outcomes and providing insights into the decision-making process regarding article inclusion and exclusion. The analysis revealed that a total of 418 articles were initially obtained from four distinct databases. Subsequently, the research team meticulously assessed this dataset, leading to the exclusion of 168 reports during the preliminary screening phase. Consequently, only 250 articles underwent further in-depth screening.

During this more rigorous screening process, 220 reports were deemed ineligible as they did not meet the predefined criteria for selection. However, 30 reports met the criteria

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and were thus targeted for retrieval. Subsequent retrieval efforts resulted in the identification of 30 eligible reports. Nevertheless, upon closer examination, it became evident that 17 of these reports did not focus on women in leadership, and as a result, they were excluded from the review.

Ultimately, after this meticulous evaluation process, only 13 reports were considered suitable and were included in the final review. This refined selection represents the core body of literature that will inform the subsequent stages of the research project.

Results

Background to the Selected Articles

This study has come up with eleven and seven themes for both the challenges and strategies of integrating African women academics respectively based on the thematic analysis carried out on the 13 included articles. The identified themes are: Stereotypical expectations (cultural and societal), lack of leadership skills, ineffective mentorship, inadequate (physical and social) resources, unclear goals/ social value conflict, professional role conflict, lack/ irregular leadership training, stress and bullying by male colleagues, feminist brain drain, old boy's network/queen bee syndrome, and unfavourable organizational climate. The themes for the coping strategies include acknowledging women administrative ability, advocacy and agency, provision of materials, mentorship programmes, regular training, institutional supports/ sponsorship, and healthy industrial environment.

Table 2 provides an overview of the literature reviewed in this study, categorized under five major headings: authors and years of publication, article titles, research methods employed, study samples, and the major findings of the reviewed studies. These characteristics offer a comprehensive insight into the diverse body of research contributing to our understanding of the topic at hand.

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Table 2.
Key Findings from The Included Studies

S/N	Authors and year	Title	Method	sample	Findings
1	(Scheepers & Mahlangu, 2022)	Male executives' experiences of mentoring black African women in South Africa	Qualitative	21 male executives	**Challenges** Stereotypical expectation of women as homemakers
2	(Mashele & Alagidede, 2022)	The appropriate of leadership styles in times of crisis: a study of women in senior leadership positions in corporate south Africa	Qualitative	17 participants	Strategies Instilling of leadership qualities like assertiveness, confidence, innovative thinking, effective communication and transformative leadership skill.
3	(J. Ramohai, 2019)	Women in senior management positions at south African universities: their movement in, out and across universities	Qualitative		**Challenges** 1.Leadership skills (assertiveness, confidence, innovativeness, effective communication 2. hostile institutional culture
4	(N. J. Ramohai & Holtzhausen, 2022)	Academic women departmental heads' coping mechanisms during COVID-19: A capabilities approach perspective	Qualitative	10 heads of departments	Strategies 1. self-control, connectedness, and accepting responsibilities managing technology. 2. physical resources 3. social resources
5	(Cochran et al., 2019)	Barriers to careers identified by women in academic surgery: a grounded theory	Qualitative	15 medical academics	**Challenges** 1. lack of belonging 2. ineffective mentorship 3. inadequate resources 4. unclear expectation for advancement 5. professional role conflict 6. work-life integration 7. social value conflict
6	(Nyoni & He, 2019)	The status of gender in senior leadership positions in higher education universities in Tanzania	Mixed Method	250 participants from the university	1. gender biased policy 2. Men outnumbered women in Deanship position
7	(Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan, 2020)	Understanding the career trajectories of Black female academics in South Africa: A case study of UKZN	Qualitative	14 academic staff	**Challenges** 1. stress 2. bullying by male colleague 3. the old men network Strategies 1. mentoring programmes

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8	(Omotoso, 2022)	Barriers to Middle-level Academic Leadership for Female Academics in Nigerian Higher Education	Qualitative	Two universities	1.feminist brain drain 2. queen bee syndrome 3. feminist crab syndrome 4. avenger syndrome Strategies 2. supports for women career progress 3. Acknowledging women administrative capacity
9	(Babalola et al., 2021)	Insight Into the Organizational Culture and Challenges Faced by Women STEM Leaders in Africa	Qualitative	54 women from African countries	Challenges 1. Cultural and societal stereotype 2. Lack of cooperation from colleagues 3. Weighty family responsibility 4. Lack of sponsorship and empowerment 5. Shortage of research equipment Strategies 1. Equal professional treatment
10	(Herbst & Roux, 2021)	Toxic Leadership: A Slow Poison Killing Women Leaders in Higher Education in South Africa?	Mixed	42 women leaders in universities	Challenges 1. Negative working environment Strategies 1. Creating Healthy institutional environment
11	(Seale et al., 2021)	Enabling and empowering women in leadership in South African universities – Assessing needs and designing a response	Mixed	74 women	Challenges 1. Inadequate leadership skills 2. Isolation and lack of supports 3. Low self-esteem Strategies 1. Further training and development
12	(Reilly, 2021)	Rwandan women in Higher Education: progress, successes, Challenges	Qualitative	20 men and women	Challenges 1. Patriarchal and societal tradition Strategies 1. Opportunity for further education
13	(Moodly, 2022)	Exercising positional power to advance and support women in leadership-conversations with men in higher education	Qualitative	Six men	Challenges 1. Bullying 2. Traditional and socio-cultural expectations Strategies 1. Advocacy and agency

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Discussion

Themes for the Challenges

Stereotypical Expectations (Cultural and Societal)

The primary obstacle to female academics' ascension to the position of leadership or accepting leadership assignment is cultural and societal stereotypical expectations. Scheepers and Mahlangu (2022) found in their study that there is erroneous belief that women are by default meant to be home makers, and so, they need not be in managerial positions. This cultural imbalance profiling of women (Potokri & Perumal, 2019; Riche et al., 2023) has contributed to increase in women attrition in schools and workplace. In addition, Gaus et al. (2023) also found in the qualitative study conducted that women are relegated in the society with the belief that they do not have leadership qualities. To this end, women academics always find it challenging to strike a balance between family responsibility and professional achievement (Stead et al., 2023).

Lack of Leadership Skills

According to Ramohai's (2019) findings, lack of some leadership attributes like assertiveness, confidence, innovativeness, and effective communication skills among other qualities by many female academics contribute to female underrepresentation in managerial cadre. For instance, women are unlikely to use negotiation to advance themselves to actualize their dreams than their male counterparts (Stead et al., 2023). Despite many competent Women in the academics, they are not usually given opportunity to rule due to the belief that they lack leadership qualities (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Further, research outcome has suggested that inability of women to manage their emotion is a contributory factor to why they are not integrated into leadership positions (Gaus et al., 2023).

Ineffective Mentorship

Ineffective mentorship refers to a situation where female academics, particularly, feel that they lack adequate guidance, support, and mentorship within their academic institutions or professional networks. This lack of effective mentorship can result in feelings of isolation, hindered career growth, and a diminished sense of belonging within the academic community. Many female academics complain of lack of belonginess and mentorship (Cochran et al., 2019). Female in academia therefore need to be specially coached in the art and science of leading.

Inadequate (Physical and Social) Resources

Women in Academics like their men counterpart require adequate resources to advance in their career. Unfortunately, lack of material and social resources hinder the progress of women academics in their career (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Without this, women will continue to be in the back roll.

Unclear Goals/ Social Value Conflict

Another challenge identified as the major clog in the wheel of progress for women in academics is unclear career goals for women. This therefore leads to unclear expectation

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for advancement in their career (Cochran et al., 2019). Many women are confused about their future ambitions.

Professional Role Conflict

Inability to strike a balance between different engagements in their profession. For instance, an engineer who wants to practice as an engineer and is willing to work as an academia may find it difficult to perfume efficiently and effectively. Cochran et al. (2019) assert that there is always tension for female academic who found herself in medical field between clinical productivity and academic career advancement.

Lack/ Irregular Leadership Training

It is a fact that one cannot give what he/she did not have. This underscores the fact that many female academics did not have access to necessary leadership training. Through training, women academic leader will learn effective communication, assertiveness, empathy, among others. Women lament that they are usually deliberately sideline when it comes to training with the sole aim of denying them opportunity to advance in their careers (Riche et al., 2023).

Stress and Bullying by Male Colleagues

Study outcome has shown that female academics are facing stress in their day-to-day activities (Ramohai & Holtzhausen, 2022). It is worthy of note that the stress most female academic face in their job is linked to their unripe promotion (Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan, 2020). This can also be attributed to inadequate mentoring opportunity or incompatibility between the mentee and mentor. The male counterparts are also of primitive belief that women lack leadership qualities and as such are not competent and right candidates to lead (Gaus et al., 2023).

Feminist Brain Drain

The transfer and emigration of female human capital internationally is causing a great vacuum for female gender to match up with the male counterpart. Dumont et al. (2007) noted that the international mobility of skilled women as a by-product of the implementation of more selective labour migration policies in OECD countries. This has contributed to underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in higher institutions. The scholars (Dumont et al., 2007) further found that the higher the number of women brain drain, the poorer their country of origin. It was also found that unfavourable work environment in African higher education institutions is a major contributor to women academics' brain drain (Nabawanuka, 2011).

Old Boy's Network/Queen Bee Syndrome

The Old Boy's Network refers to an informal and exclusive network of influential individuals, typically men, who use their connections to help each other advance in their careers. This network often includes alumni of prestigious institutions, senior faculty members, and leaders in academia. This network can be a significant barrier for women in academia. Since it is historically dominated by men, women may find it difficult to access the same

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opportunities, mentorship, and support that their male counterparts receive. On the other hand, the Queen Bee Syndrome describes a phenomenon where a woman in a leadership position may hinder the progress and opportunities of other women within the same organization. Instead of supporting and mentoring female colleagues, the "queen bee" may distance herself and align more closely with male colleagues. The Queen Bee Syndrome can perpetuate a hostile environment for women in leadership roles. When female leaders do not support or empower other women, it can lead to a sense of competition rather than cooperation among women in academia. This, in turn, can discourage women from aspiring to leadership positions and undermine their sense of belonging. This lack of inclusion can hinder their career advancement. Lack of cooperation and belonginess created by elites especially those who are already in the leadership spaces is another challenge to women in academics.

Unfavourable Organizational Climate

The climate where female academic work can also figure out how such an individual will go in career or attaining leadership positions (Lee, 2021). Moodly (2022) found that female academics lament that the organization where they work did not reflect a fair work environment because men always decision makers. Leadership of the higher education institutions should put in place some measures to determine gender discrimination and provide interventions to halt obnoxious behaviour (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017).

Themes for the Coping Strategies

Acknowledging Women Administrative Capacity and their Weaknesses

The higher education institution leadership can play a significant role in improving the challenges women academic face (Potokri & Perumal, 2019). This can be done through implementation of policies that will emphasize the recognition of women capacity to lead (Stead et al., 2023). By doing so, the gap created by gender disparity in all spheres of life can be closed.

Advocacy and Agency

Advocacy increases level of awareness of policy, duties and obligation of every stakeholders (Adewale, 2022). It is therefore important as a matter urgency for relevant and concerned authorities to explore and employ advocacy as a means of integrating women in leadership positions. Moodly (2022) recommends advocacy and agency as a virile means of making the voices of female academics to be heard and eventually occupying the position of authority in their various citadels of learning. Engaging women in activities that promote acquisition, and development of leadership skills (Lee, 2021) are part of the functions of advocacy groups female academics themselves should try to aspire for leadership roles.

Provision of Materials

Management should provide the necessary materials to support women to ascend the senior management positions (Lee, 2021). This will enable them to be focused on their career (Adewale, 2023; Adewale et al., 2022)and aspire to be in the managerial cadre. Sometime, there is willingness and opportunity for women to lead, but lack of materials for the office incapacitates them.

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Mentorship Programmes

Special attention needs to be given to mid-career faculty women especially. This could be achieved by organizing mentoring and networking programmes for them (Lee, 2021). In addition to mentorship programme, there should be peer network to strengthen and encourage one another to accept leadership roles (Adewale & Adebayo, 2020; Gaus et al., 2023). women in academia if allowed to participate in mentoring programme will find the strategies and wealth of experience of their mentors useful in charting their life careers (Anuar et al., 2022).

Regular Training

There is need for regular periodical leadership training programmes targeted at the female personnel. This will instill in them consciousness about how they can contribute to institutional development when they are assigned (Ngwira & Potokri, 2019). There should always be useful leadership training for the women in academic (Chitsamatanga et al., 2018).

Institutional Supports/ Sponsorship

Women in academic should be given psychological and material supports when assigned leadership roles. Emotional supports for all women to be able to cope with bullying, bias and aggression from other gender is a good recommendation (Gaus et al., 2023). The organization support and sponsorship can be leveraged upon by women in academia (Anuar et al., 2022) to catapult themselves into the administrative space.

Healthy Industrial Environment

The work environment where support is heartily provided for everyone to succeed (Stead et al., 2023), with special attention for women. Policies can be made to guard against any form of discrimination, gender, racial and religious prejudices.

Conclusion

The results of the finding have revealed that there are many ongoing efforts by various stakeholders to combat gender inequality. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also have as its fifth goal, achieving gender equality, and empowering women and girls to bridge the wide gender gaps. There are therefore suggestions that the African higher education institutions should aggressively invest in mentoring programmes for female academics in particular. It will perhaps be efficacious in integrating women academics into leadership positions in Africa. Higher education institutions should champion women leadership project and make concerted efforts should be made to invest studies on gender.

Implications of the Research Findings

The systematic review has provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by African women in academic leadership roles. The findings of this study have far-reaching implications and can be applied in various ways to foster positive change and

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promote gender equality in academia across the African continent. Here are some key implications of the research findings:

The study highlights the need for policy changes and advocacy efforts to address the barriers faced by African women in academic leadership. Institutions and governments can use these findings to develop and implement gender-inclusive policies that support the advancement of women in academic leadership positions. This may include measures such as mentorship programs, leadership training, and equal opportunity initiatives. However, to ensure the effectiveness of implemented policies and initiatives, regular evaluation and monitoring are essential. Academic institutions should establish mechanisms to track the progress of women in leadership positions and assess the impact of gender-inclusive strategies.

Also, Academic institutions can use the study's insights to design and offer targeted capacity-building programs and training for aspiring female leaders. These programs can focus on leadership skills development, confidence-building, and strategies for overcoming gender-specific challenges in academia.

The study underscores the importance of mentorship and networking for women in academia. Institutions can establish formal mentorship programs that pair experienced female leaders with emerging scholars, providing guidance and support for career advancement. Additionally, fostering networks and communities of women in academia can help create a supportive environment for sharing experiences and best practices.

The study can serve as a foundation for further research and in-depth investigations into specific aspects of gender inequality in academic leadership in Africa. Researchers can build on these findings to explore regional variations, identify successful interventions, and assess the long-term impact of gender-inclusive policies.

The study results can also be used to raise public awareness about the importance of gender diversity in academic leadership and its benefits for the broader society. Advocacy campaigns can leverage these findings to mobilize support for gender equality initiatives within academic institutions and beyond. By so doing, African universities and academic organizations can collaborate with international partners and institutions that have successfully addressed gender disparities in academia. Sharing best practices and lessons learned can help accelerate progress in integrating African women into leadership roles.

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Human Participants

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