

Barriers of Women Senior Academic Leadership on Public Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia

Yewognesh Kedir Ahmed

School of Public Administration, Huazhong University of Science and Technology
Wuhan, China
yewogk21@gmail.com

Abstract: *In recent years, gender equality has become a principal area of concern. Although the international campaigns for gender equality and equity in Higher Education Institutions, studies conducted in several countries continue to show that women are underrepresented in senior academic leadership positions in higher education institutions. In higher education subsector in Ethiopia women leaders are very few. This study aimed to explore the barriers women encounter in attaining senior academic leadership positions in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia. There has been a stark absence of empirical studies in the field of Ethiopian public higher education institution to investigate these issues and assess the implications. The purpose of this study is to contribute further empirical evidence in support of this claim and to help bridge the gap. The study used literature sources, document analysis and observation method to collect relevant information which used to generate the results and conclusion of this study. The findings from the study revealed that women are indeed underrepresented in the senior academic leadership positions of universities in Ethiopia. There are several factors at the personal, institutional and socio-cultural levels preventing qualified women from ascending to senior positions in higher education institutions. Suggestions were on how the barriers could be broken and they include: an increased societal participation on the topic, needs to be a reforming of the educational system, leadership training and development for women, women education /education of the girl child and mentoring, more research which will provide needed information among others. Also, women be bold and possess enough confidence was recommended for women, to make them effective senior academic leaders. .*

Keywords: public higher education, barriers of women, gender equality, senior leadership, Ethiopia

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, gender equality has become a principal area of concern. Although the international campaigns for gender equality and equity in Higher Education Institutions, studies conducted in several countries continue to show that women are underrepresented in senior academic leadership positions. For example, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in eight specific areas that were established by the United Nations for the period from 2000–2015 included targets for improving gender equality and the empowerment of women, including improved access to education (United Nations New Millennium Goals 2017). The UN subsequently established 17 Sustainable Development Goals for the period of 2016–2030, one of which focuses on providing “women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making process” (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2017).

In higher education gender imbalance in leadership is still a global concern because the progress towards equity has been very slow and uneven, even though more women are now advancing to leadership positions in higher education (Airini et al., 2011; Davidson & Burke, 2004). The principle of equality of men and women was first recognized in 1945 in the United Nations Charter, and subsequently in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Among the influential amendments made so far, the Beijing Platform for action (BPA 1995) is the most notable. Miranda (2005) noted that the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 best recognized the key condition for women’s empowerment. Women in power and decision-making are required for democratic governance and it was identified as one of twelve critical areas of concern in its Beijing Platform for Action.

In line with major international human rights instruments, and regional frameworks that grant the equal participation of women in the social, economic, and political sphere of lives, the Ethiopian Constitution in its article 35 grants women the right for equal participation in the public and political life.

The lack of significant proportions of women in senior leadership and decision-making positions is observed in every organization which seems to be a worldwide phenomenon (Alimo-Metcalfe, B. 2010). At all leadership positions compared to men women are disproportionately underrepresented (World Economic Forum 2018). A recent study by Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women which was presented in the Women in Politics 2019 map, shows that out of 188 countries, the number of countries with women as heads of government and heads of state are only 18 (IPU and UN Women 2019). In addition Data from the global gender gap 2018 report also shows the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions where out of the 149 countries assessed, only 18% of ministers are women and women only hold 34% of managerial positions (World Economic Forum 2018).

In academia, the condition is alike. Gender inequality still exists (Cairncross, 2015), as more men continue to control senior leadership positions globally. That seems to be the case in Ethiopia. The position of power and institutional direction still

dominated by male voices; this situation has been worsened by women's somewhat recent entry into academia; as a result, they have further been marginalized from senior leadership positions of academies. Although women play important roles and realize many responsibilities in academia, their contributions have rarely been recognized within many universities

Success today requires higher education institutions to best utilize the talent available to them, irrespective of the gender. Accordingly, to be able to use that talent, barriers to upward mobility for women need to be removed. Such barriers are represented in the discrimination against women in the workplace when it comes to promotion, salary, and advancement opportunity to higher level managerial positions.

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, outright sex discrimination is but one barrier to women attaining leadership roles (U.S. EEOC, 2017b). There are also other elusive problems that discourage women from pursuing the top spots, such as hostile work environments, negative stereotypes, and bias (Moor, Cohen, & Beeri, 2015). Airini, et. al., (2011) argues that although a few women do advance to leadership roles in universities, "gender imbalance among senior university academics is an acknowledged problem in many countries" (p. 44). Morley (2014) presents a statistical snapshot of women Vice-Chancellors across the globe which shows that among the selected countries, Hong Kong performs the worst with having no female as a Vice-Chancellor; followed by, Kuwait (2%), Japan (2.3%), India (3%) and Turkey (7%). Statistics from the European Union are equally disheartening that report only 13% of Vice-Chancellor positions are held by women while the United Kingdom reports that 14% of their Vice-Chancellors are women.

Furthermore, as of 2012 in United States (US), women comprised only 26% of all college presidents (Davis & Maldonado, 2015) and at the rank of full professor for the probably because of its more aggressive affirmative action policies has just 28% women compared to Canada 18.8% (CAUT 2006, 6).

Likewise, (Egunjobi 2008) observed that academic profession has been viewed as a single sex profession long before now, but as at today the percentage of women academic staff in most countries are still very low compared to their male counterpart though rising gradually. Examples are: USA 45% Jamaica 50%, Nigeria, 13.6%, Ghana, 9.5%, Tanzania, 11%, and an average of 24% in most Commonwealth nations.

Ethiopian is not an exception; despite the vast expansion of higher education institutions and the efforts underway in Ethiopia, females remain chronically underrepresented in higher education and academic leadership (Asmamaw, 2017). Despite that the rate of females joining higher educations is faster than males by 16.4% annually and that of male annual average increment is 8.2%, in 2019, 15% of the academic staff in Ethiopia higher education institutions were women and 85% were men. Only 15.4% different leadership positions in the 44 government universities were held by women and there were no female president (MoSHE, 2019) and although some universities have hired more women, their percentage in leadership is still very low (Lapin & Sullivan, 2014). According to (Helina, 2014) fewer than 5% of deans and only 3% of department heads in public universities were female. Besides to this, only about one-third of board member positions held by women, less than one-fourth of vice presidents were women, and just 9.6% of top management were women. This implies that female academic staffs have list portion in the higher educational ranks. This shows that the national educational policy which pledged to fill 20% of top academic positions (i.e., university Presidents and Vice Presidents) by 2015 was not achieved (ESDP IV, 2010-15), and the number of female academic staffs and leaders in Ethiopia is still not proportional to the size of the population.

Thus, the issue of equity in education between male and female groups has been a serious problem in Ethiopian education system at all levels in general, and in higher education in particular. In Ethiopia the higher education subsystem has passed through a series of policy reforms in the last two decades. Key reform areas ranged from improving quality and relevance of programs to promoting equality in access to and success in Higher Education. As a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals, Ethiopia pledged to pursue a series of benchmarks and targets relating to gender equality. The targets aim to empower women and eliminate gender disparity in all level of education by 2015. The importance of girl's education and among others for instance, the education and training policy declared in 1994 has addressed clearly stated that the government will give financial support to raise the participation of women in education.. It further stated that special attention would be given to the participation, recruitment, training and assignment of female teachers.

One of the major goals of the MDG also focuses on gender equality with the target of eliminating gender disparity in education, employment, and political participation by 2015 (Teklu, 2013). Despite the national, regional, and international campaigns for gender equality and equity in Higher Education Institutions, studies conducted in several countries continue to show that women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions in universities.

It can be concluded that despite global and national efforts made to improve the status of women in societies, there is, globally, a disproportionate number of women in universities, especially in upper levels of management and in senior ranks of the academic ladder.

More diverse perspectives from developing countries thus contribute to the growing debate about women's representation in senior academic leadership positions in higher education. A key focus of this research is on public higher education institution in Ethiopia

was to explore barriers of women senior academic leadership. The barriers of women senior academic leadership on public higher education institutions were explored through three Specific objectives :

- i. To examine the current status of women in academic senior leadership in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia as compared to men.
- ii. To identify the barriers that prevents women from being promoted to senior academic leadership on public higher education institutions.
- iii. To recommend the possible solutions and policy options that can contribute to ameliorate the dismal situation of women in senior academic leadership in public higher education institutions

2. CONTRIBUTION OF THE CURRENT STUDY

The findings of this study not only to provide an updated review of women academic leadership barriers that prevent from being promoted to senior positions in public higher education institutions research, but also incorporates recent contribution. And seeks to fill this gap in the literature by proposing a range of mitigating strategies for navigating these barriers and achieving and maintaining a better gender balance in the Senior Academic leadership position in public higher education institution in Ethiopia. On the hand the finding of this study may call for further studies and thus could open the way for researchers.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership

In Higher Education to take on Leadership is a challenging role (Lorenz, 2014). In an administrative context forms of leadership vary significantly from official positions, such as president of an institution ,dean of faculty or rector/vice-principal/ ,head of school ,head of department to leaders in their academic discipline through educational, entrepreneurial activities and top-level research (Mitchell, 2015). Depending on the position the level of leadership requirements varies, with middle managers, i.e. programme, department and school leaders having significant discretionary powers (Smyth, 1997). Academic leadership essentially, is considered fast paced, with high responsibility and little personal time (Lorenz, 2014), which may appear unappealing to high profile professionals and academics. The academic workload is referred to as a troika of research, education and service (Mitchell, 2015).

Moreover Higher Education leadership development follows different paths, as over time men commonly develop strong non-head of department identities and also clear and positive manager identifies, while women acquire gender-focused and problem-oriented leadership identities (Haake, 2009). However, female leaders still experience differential treatment in Higher Education, which leads to potentially disadvantaged work situations (Morley, 2013b; Shain, 2000).

Female leadership in academia

Although the numbers have been increasing, female leaders in academia are still not considered a common occurrence (Lie and Malik, 2014), (Fritsch, 2016). The burgeoning literature on women and educational leadership has continued to direct scholarly attention to women's overrepresentation in the teaching population, and their under-representation in educational leadership positions (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2009). Much of this literature serves the purpose of reminding us of the ever-present barriers associated with women leading in education.

The emergent literature on educational leadership and women in global contexts shows the significance of political, historical, sociocultural, and economic context with regard to women's leadership. Historically, in higher education leadership has been organized in hierarchical structures that have continued to be reinforced by social formations of bureaucracies informed by liberal political theories premised upon individual merit (Blackmore 2005; Fletcher 2007). In senior educational leadership positions these structures have frequently favored male academics (Shakeshaft et al. 2007), for example, as Faculty and Academic Deans, Pro-vice Chancellors, Departmental Chairpersons, and in positions chairing university-wide committees.

Women that take on leadership positions do not always have an easy career path to follow (Eagly and Carli, 2007), and in some contexts, consider themselves the "donkeys of the university" (Mabokela, 2003).

Historic debates around gender focus on the numerical figures of women's representation in formal leadership roles and the differing rates of female academics' promotion compared to their male colleagues. But leadership is contextual (Strachan et al. 2010) and situational (Fitzgerald 2006) .Morley (2012, 121) argues that we need to 'unmask the "rules of the game" that lurk beneath the surface rationality of academic meritocracy'

Some argue to consider how women as a group understand what improves or hampers their access to leadership positions that further investigation is required (Airini et al. 2010). Much of the research is western-centric (for some exceptions see Akao 2008; McNae and Strachan 2010; Vali 2010;Warsal 2009), informed by a mainstream epistemology about women in educational leadership roles that has been constructed, classified and theorized from a white hegemonic perspective (with some exceptions, see Oplatka 2006). Fitzgerald (2006) notes that Western values and leadership practices homogenize, marginalize and silence women educational leaders from developing countries, arguing 'there is a need to formulate Indigenous and non-western theories of

educational leadership that are grounded in research that account for and explain Indigenous women's ways of knowing and leading' (6–7).

Furthermore, Prior literature has highlighted why women are believed to experience low representation in HE leadership roles (Morley, 2013a). Morley (2013a) labels these reasons “the gendered division of labour; gender bias and misrecognition; management and masculinity; greedy organizations; and work/life balance challenges” (p. 7). The first one refers to the concept of academia being a zone in which individuals are free of any responsibilities except what relates to work (Lynch, 2010; Morley, 2013a). However, women often cross the boundaries between work and family, as they are typically considered the primary caretaker for children, sick and elderly (Runte and Mills, 2004), and as a result may suffer negative bias in the workplace (Bardoel et al., 2011). As a result of these influences, women are often relegated to the “lesser” managerial roles, such as human resources, quality assurance and marketing, and remain in assistant and/or adjunct positions (Bagilhole and White, 2011). Although the gender imbalance at top-level leadership in higher education is evident in most countries (Shepherd, 2017), there are several undertakings and projects seeking to reduce these inequalities

Barriers to Female Leadership

In the literature, barriers to women leadership have been addressed from both an institutional as well as cultural perspective. Even though there has been a growth in the number of female employees in middle administration positions (Schwanke, 2013; Davis & Maldonado, 2015), it seems like executive positions remain to be led by men. Some research goes further by presenting a comparison of women in management today and those who were housewives in the 1960s; as a result, the media and cultural references accept and celebrate equality achievement among women when in reality, that is not the case. This perceived equality, asserted Schwanke (2013), creates confusion and contradiction as women are largely underrepresented in directorship, governance as well as executive leadership. Women find there is a lack of mentorship and development programs for leadership (Parker, 2015).

Additionally, Diehl (2014) referred to second-generation forms of gender bias such as cultural beliefs about gender, and workplace structures, practices, and patterns that inadvertently favor men and represent unseen obstacles to women's advancement to senior leadership roles.

Women who aspire to or have obtained leadership positions face innumerable barriers reaching top-level leadership roles and maintaining a presence in those roles (BlackChen, 2015). This study contributes to this lacuna by providing insights into examining barriers of senior academic leadership positions in Higher Education Institutions.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several theories can provide a suitable framework for conceptualizing women in leadership. The role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002) suggested that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: first, when women are regarded less favorably than men in regard to possibly occupying leadership roles, and secondly, evaluating behaviors that realize the prescriptions of a leadership role that is less encouraging when women enacted it.

In addition to approaches and outlooks being less optimistic toward female than potential male leaders, it is also more challenging for women to develop into leadership roles and succeed in their various leadership roles. The role congruity theory considers the agreement between gender roles and other roles, particularly, leadership roles. The probability of prejudice against female leaders that tends to be integral in female gender role follows from its dissimilarity to the beliefs that individuals naturally have about leaders. People, therefore, are inclined to have a dissimilar belief about leaders and women as well as comparable beliefs about leaders and men. Because, prejudice

(Eagly & Karau, 2002) can come about when observers judge women as the actual or probable occupier of a leadership role, due to the discrepancy between the mostly communal qualities that observers associated with women and the mostly agentic qualities they believe are essential for a leader to succeed.

A huge portion of the social role theory stated that the majority of the belief about the traits of men and women pertains to the communal and agentic attributes. Further, the social role theory and the leadership categorization theory (Kacmar et al., 2011) stated that gender differences occur because of two interrelated processes: social learning and societal power relations behavior, meaning that some of what may be seen as gender suitable behaviors are usually learned through social modeling and strengthened through society's power and status structures.

Other related Studies

According to Mbepera (2015) who did an exploration of the influences of female under-representation in senior leadership positions in community secondary schools (CSSs) in Rural Tanzania, he explored the influences of female under-representation in senior leadership positions in community secondary schools in rural Tanzania. The study found that, at the individual, organizational and societal level, these proved to be strong barriers to leadership succession and resulted in on-going, significant challenges for incumbent female leaders.

Besides to this, in her research topic entitled Representation of Women in Top Educational Management and Leadership Positions in Kenya, (Amondi, 2011) investigated factors causing under representation of women in top educational management and

leadership positions at the Ministry of Education headquarters in Kenya. The findings showed that 33.3 percent and 32.1 percent of top and middle management positions respectively were held by women. In terms of professional qualifications, 55 percent and 51.5 percent of M.Ed and B.Ed holders respectively, were women. Both male and female genders were rated 'high' in possession of skills and personality characteristics the respondents considered important for top educational management and leadership positions.

The study done in Pakistan by (Yousaf and Schmiede, 2017) revealed that there are several barriers which women might be experiencing in academia ranging from personal, organizational to societal. (Asmamaw, 2017) observed the similar results in his study done in Ethiopia. His study discovered that, women are indeed underrepresented in the management of universities in Ethiopia. He found that, there are several factors at the personal, institutional and societal levels preventing women from ascending to management positions in universities (Asmamaw 2017). This argument is also supported by (He, 2017) who identified three main barriers for women under-representation in leadership positions. Namely; ethnic, administration and personal barriers. The findings also display various interventions which have been taken to combat the situation in Ethiopia,

Method and Data Collection Tool

This paper is a mixed based study. It employed the literature review, and the document analysis technique as a qualitative research method. The document analysis technique defined a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both hard copy, electronic computer-based and internet transmitted material (Bowen, 2009). This study used relevant literatures, theoretical justification, National and International reports to collect the facts and current information about the study, which in turn helped to generate the findings and the conclusion of the study.

Author used the data and information provided by Ministry of science and higher education (MoSHE) statistics annual abstract 2014-2019 .The reviewed studies and analyzed documents, consolidates the findings of the current study.

Due to the fact that, the rationale for document analysis comes when it will be used in combination with other qualitative research method as suggested by (Yin, 2003), this study also applied observation method as a means of triangulation in order to seek convergence and corroboration of the study through the different data sources and methods. Author used the observation method as a matter of fact that, she is working in a head office of Prosperity Party Women's League department whereby, among other things has a role of overseeing gender issues which the office dealing with. The Author did not use her personal understanding in generating study's findings, instead she used her field works and office gained experience on matters related to the study topic, to build the study's concepts and basic arguments.

Findings

The findings of this study were presented basing on the specific objectives of the study. The specific objectives were to examine the current status of women in academic senior leadership in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia as compared to men, barriers that prevents women from being promoted to senior academic leadership and to recommend possible solutions and policy options that can contribute to ameliorate the dismal situation of women in senior academic leadership in public higher education institutions.

Status of women in university management compared to men

To find out the positions women were occupying in the university management as compared to those of men the researcher used administrative and academic staff lists (where these were made available), from Education Statistics Annual Abstract. Analysis of the obtained data from the documents revealed that women are occupying a small percentage of the senior management positions of the universities surveyed. The findings are summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1: Management positions in public universities, by position type and gender, 2018/2019

Position	Number Required	Currently Assigned				
		Male	Female	Total	Percentage male	Percentage female
Board Members	315	210	101	311	67.5%	32.5%
Top Management	243	189	20	209	90.4%	9.6%
Middle Level	2131	1,741	218	1,959	88.9%	11.1%
Lower Level	5201	4,089	855	4,944	82.7%	17.3%
Total (excluding board members)	7575	6,019	1,093	7,112	84.6%	15.4%

Source: Representation in management positions, compiled from Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2018/2019

This data shows that 32.5% of university board members are women. This is much higher than the target of 25% and are 20 women in top management positions. There are 17 universities with at least one woman in a top management position which does not meet the target of having at least one woman in a top management position in every university. 17.3% of lower management are held by women. This does not meet the target of 30% of lower management being women. In general across all management levels, only 15.4% of management positions are filled by women.

Table 2: Representation by academic ranks at public universities, (2018/19)

Position	Number of Staff			Percentage of Staff	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Graduate Assistant	5,404	1,676	7,080	76.3%	23.7%
Lecturer	16,489	2,676	19,165	86.0%	14.0%
Assistant Professor	4,093	440	4,533	90.3%	9.7%
Associate Professor	831	33	864	96.2%	3.8%
Professor	190	3	193	98.4%	1.6%
Total					

Source: Representation in academic rank, compiled from Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2018/2019.

Academic ranks of the women show another telling story of their disadvantageous status in universities. Table 2 shows that most women were Graduate Assistant with and below the academic rank of in all the public universities. However, as shown in Table 2, there were only three women full professors in the public universities of the country. The relative shortage of women at the assistant and associate professor levels is also noticeable.

Barriers that prevents women from being promoted to senior academic leadership

The findings of this study show that the under-representation of women in academic senior leadership positions emanates from various, albeit inter-related factors. There are increasing numbers of women in top positions in politics, and in both private and public sectors world-wide. Yet top management in higher education is overwhelmingly a male preserve. Similar studies have consistently shown that women are underrepresented in university management in Ethiopia and in other parts of the world (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017, Asmamaw 2017, Bobuwela & Dealwis 2013, Singh 2002, Asmah 1993). The path to top management in a university is generally built on experience as head of department and dean. Barriers which interrupt that natural progression for women are personal, institutional and societal barrier. These factors are summarized below.

Social-cultural barriers

The study findings discovered that, the sociocultural context was a barrier to women's low hierarchical positions in universities, particularly to their progress toward top positions or even toward being valued and accepted in their society. Culture plays significant role in the entire socialization process and inculcating the patriarchal social structure. Women in some cultures find it difficult to exert authority over males. Women in advanced industrialized societies as well as those in the developing world still suffer from the myth that women are too emotional or too illogical for senior management, or best suited to the domestic maintenance aspects of administration. This alludes to cultural values that are gender discriminatory and not necessarily exclusive to the Ethiopian context. It also found that patriarchal setup could intricate into women's low hierarchical positions, regardless of women's qualification and education; organizations prefer to appoint male heads.

Despite the increasing number of educated women and men in the country, the gendered stereotypes on women's leadership is intense. The study findings indicated that culture influences participation of women in leadership in university management in Ethiopia. Traditional beliefs and cultural attitude regarding the role and status of women in society are still prevalent and top leadership in any institution is viewed as a masculine domain. These findings supported by (Yousaf and Schmiede, 2017) and (Asmamaw 2017).

Institutional barriers

The study findings found that, institutional barriers were one of the barriers faced by women senior academic leadership. In the institution level, discrimination against women was as the reason why women were missing from management of universities. Secondary voices from other literature sources show that as political appointment of presidents and vice-presidents, irrelevant

questions asked at interviews, male chauvinism, patriarchal structure of the academy, and the fact that appointment required long experience were some of the reasons.

It cannot be expected that numbers of women in senior management will increase while so few are employed in academic or administrative positions compared to men. Several writers note that in spite of the difficulties that women face in gaining access to education, there are women well-qualified for academic positions who nevertheless fail to be selected.

Discriminatory appointment and promotion practices constitute barriers in institutions without equal opportunity policies (Seyoum, 1991). These findings supported by (Tadesse, 2017) and (Yousaf and Schmiede, 2017).

Personal barrier

The findings also revealed that another factor that may be hindering women from participating in senior academic senior leadership position is the personal barrier. The qualitative data seemed to tie up well with some studies (Achola & Aseka, 2001) which suggest that some women are not assertive enough, while others do not want power, lack self-confidence and rarely apply for administrative jobs. This implies that in addition to external factors, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions may be attributed to lack of initiative from women themselves as supported by Marianne (1997).

Studies by Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) and Eagly and Carli (2007) have found similar trends in their studies. They further elaborated that if women's behavior seems too assertive and masculine at work they may be seen as competent but not likable; if their behavior is too feminine, they may be seen as likable but incompetent (Eagly and Carli 2007; Bombuwela and De Alwis 2013). This barrier could easily be seen on the aspect of shortage of competition, inadequate capacity building, and lack of confidence, low qualification as well as fear of failure. Meanwhile, women stereotype qualities like compassion, usefulness, friendliness, and tenderness as reveals by (Tritt 2009); (Reishus 2012); (Glazer-Raymo 2001); (Dominici, Fried et al. 2009) do not clarify women to be effective leaders. In addition to that, women with poor confidence.

The cultural belief that it is the woman's responsibility to look after the children militates against their assuming leadership positions. As Kaparou & Bush (2007) found in their study, women do not feel able to hold senior positions in education because of the dual demands of management and family responsibilities. These findings supported by (Asimwe & Atukwase, 2017)

Strategies Enhancing Female Participation in senior Academic Leadership

Study findings discovered that, barriers of women senior academic leadership is a very complex issue, since that hinder advancement of women senior academic leadership contributed by a number of factors which associated directly with women's participation in general and in university management in particular. Thus, the current study call for a comprehensive strategy for female senior academic leadership that is focused on equal opportunities. A comprehensive affirmative action strategy for equal outcomes encompasses measures related to access to institutions, as well as academic and leadership support, and a gender-friendly environment.

Useful insights have been brought by analyzing previous literatures on gender parity in Higher Education on international and national policies together with intervention used to improve the status of gender in Higher Education in different setting. (Onsongo, 2009) make analysis on the impact of affirmative action policies aiming on improving gender parity in admission for Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya and found the weakness regarding the strategy that focus only on points of having university admission something which could not improve the status of gender parity and access in Higher Education leadership.

(Määttä and Dahlborg Lyckhage 2011) argues that, women do participate in Higher Education leadership, though their statistics are very low. So there is a need for collective efforts in order to push the agenda into practice and come up with the vision of the type of sustainable intervention which is required to build university of the future which is gender sensitive in leadership and decision making matters.

As part of the implementation strategies for the reforms, the Ethiopian government designed and implemented affirmative action in 1998, which aimed to promote gender equality, especially in the universities of the country. The Education and Training Policy designed by the Transition Government of Ethiopia in 1994, had components included to ensure gender equality, which among others include enabling girls for education and changing the attitudes and values of the Ethiopian society towards girls' education. In 2004, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed National Girl's Education Strategy (MoE, 2004). In 2011, the MoE also developed a *Gender Mainstreaming Guideline* to be used at different levels of the education system (MoE, 2011). Generally, in the education sector, specific steps that favor female students and civil servants have been taken at Teacher's Training Institutions, Colleges and Universities. For example, although it has been varying from year to year, entry points (average point) to preparatory school (grade 11 and 12), vocational training centers and higher education institutions have been lease for female students compare to their male counter parts. This affirmative action program enables females to enroll at universities with a 0.2 grade point average less than that of males (Egne, 2014). This program includes an initial orientation for all first year female students; female-only tutorials in four subjects such as Mathematics, English, etc. chosen by the students during their first academic year; a guidance and counselling service led by female professional counsellors on a one-to-one basis; peer counselling. In some public Universities (for example, Mekelle University, Addis Ababa University, Haromaya University), few female students selected based on their economic background have been receiving limited financial and material supports. When it comes to employment, the cumulative grade point average required to teach in public Universities, for example, have been made to be lease for female candidates

compare to their male counter parts. The same is true in terms of academic promotion and scholarship awards (Gebreyohans & Ayalew, 2014)

However, there is a gap in relation to local and sustainable gender equity interventions that can be used to enhance gender parity in Ethiopia Higher Education. As (Moletsane 2005) observes gender intrusions should deliberately positioned to address specific local issues related to gender equity locally developed and familiar to all stakeholders.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed at exploring the barriers of women senior academic leaders on public higher education institutions in Ethiopia. The investigation, based on three Specific objectives : to examine the current status of women, identify the barriers that prevents women from being promoted to senior academic leadership on public higher education institutions and recommend the possible solutions and policy options that can contribute to ameliorate the dismal situation of women in senior academic leadership in public higher education institutions.

Study results revealed that, there are a number of factors which are strongly associated with barriers of women senior academic leadership in public higher education institutions, which in turn the absence of women in senior academic senior positions and a very few are in the highest academic ranks. These factors supported by the study done in Sri Lanka findings reveal that Individual Factors, Organizational Factors and Cultural Factors have a significant effect on Women Career Development. (Bombuwela and De Alwis, 2013).

Yousaf and Schmiede observed the similar findings in their study that found that there are several barriers which women might be experiencing in academia ranging from personal, organizational to societal. (Yousaf and Schmiede, 2017).

Personal factors mentioned as one barrier for women senior academic leadership. Evidence from the literature confirm that women are less likely to run for senior academic leadership positions than men, which explains the under-representation of women in senior leadership. Among the reasons for this include a lack of confidence, family responsibilities, gender role socialization (Foley, and Elder, 2004). Besides to this lack of academic preparation as a major personal challenge for women's ascendance to senior academic leadership positions. Leadership requires a combination of knowledge, skill, attitude and self-confidence and strong self-efficacy. In relation to this, mostly, men tend to upgrade their educational level whenever they have the chance and invest on education. Once they have improved their education status, men would try any available opportunities and climb to different leadership positions. On the contrary, women spend less on education, mainly due to family responsibility. As a result, women tend to stay in lower or mid- administration level and often do not aspire and make an effort to become a senior leader compared to men. Regardless of their knowledge, experience, and extraordinary ability, women tend to stay in easeful zone to maintain the status quo at their existing positions, rather than taking promotions for higher leader positions. These findings are perfect accord with the study done in Central Uganda by (Asiimwe & Atukwase, 2017)

Institutional factors mentioned as another reason for the underrepresentation of women in senior academic leadership positions. In the institution level, discrimination against women was as the reason why women were missing from management of universities. Discriminatory appointment and promotion practices constitute barriers in institutions without equal opportunity policies Seyoum (1991). These findings are supported by (Yousaf and Schmiede, 2017) who found out that, women's low hierarchical positions in universities could be due to the selection of "sticky-floor" occupation; consequently, the low proportion of women on top hierarchy could also be attributed to women's least interest in professional growth.

Beyond the personal and institutional factors, the study's findings discovered that, socio-cultural factors. Culture influences participation of women in leadership in university management in Ethiopia. Traditional beliefs and cultural attitude regarding the role and status of women in society are still prevalent and top leadership in any institution is viewed as a masculine domain. Tadesse support the findings by discovering that socio-cultural issues, such as outlook of the community and unfavorable cultural norms, have had a significant impact on their progress achieving higher executive positions (Tadesse, 2017).

Implications

This study has generated implications for future research on barriers of women's senior academic leadership. Women's notable and persisting underrepresentation in top leading positions may be considered a critical drawback toward organizational, societal and cultural progress in terms of inclusion and balanced decision making. In Practical implications, organizations must consider competitive females in their selection and promotion decision making. African countries, especially developing countries such as Ethiopia, need to develop policies to encourage active participation of the female academicians in upper echelon. The equal employment policies will reduce the dependency ratio of females, consequently driving the country's economic growth.

The current study also generates social implications for policymakers in the African countries, particularly in Ethiopia, due to the similarity of cultural and economic background. Societies need to change their stereotype attitudes toward women and encourage them to use their potential to benefit societies by combating the barriers that continue to place women at a disadvantage.

Developing a social culture that advances women empowerment will contribute to social and infrastructure development in African countries.

Also, researchers within Higher Education can significantly contribute to a better understanding of factors at macro organizational levels. This understanding should shape the potential for HR policies within Higher Education and other public organizations in Ethiopia because HR best practice by western standards is not always applicable to other contexts such as Ethiopia as they are overpowered by institutional and cultural practices (Al Ariss and Sidani, 2016).

Conclusion

This paper highlights the barriers encounter in advancement of women senior academic leadership positions in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia. The factors are presented at the individual, cultural and institutional level on women's leadership is twofold; first, these factors prohibit women not to aspire to leadership positions, and second, they impede women's efficiency even after they assume senior academic leadership positions. The literature has shown that poor performance is not the reason women do not advance in their professional careers, since universities with female administrators in senior leadership positions present, in general, better results (Hoobler et al. 2018; Terjesen et al. 2016).

The real factors that would explain the lack of women on their road to senior management are associated with aspects intrinsic to culture. Culture can change to take advantage of the value provided by female talent. The findings provide useful descriptive statistics reporting the dominance of male in senior leadership positions such as presidents, Vice presidents, Deans of faculties and Directors of institutes. These facts are also revealed by (UNESCO, 2012) report where the proportion of men to women in middle administration and senior administration positions in higher education was estimated to the ratio of 20 to 1. Based on the findings presented in this paper, the following conclusions are made; On the one hand women are indirectly discriminated in universities towards their right of having appointment, occupation and advancement whereas their male counterparts with similar qualifications get better positions., On the other hand regarding the issue of senior leadership positions women in universities of Ethiopia are negatively perceived. In addition in Ethiopian universities institutional environment is not helpful to women in administration positions and in Ethiopian universities women are largely absent from the senior leadership positions where masculinity concept leads the system. However, all changes require leaders who inspire and allow the advancement of women and can modify the application of policies and practices that aim to close gender gap as well as affirmative actions from both organizations and the government.

Recommendations

Even though recently some attainments have been observed on the representation of women in public higher education institutions at different leadership levels, various hurdles persist in the way of safeguarding equal representation of women in senior academic leadership positions in public higher education institutions. Even if in public higher education institutions, gender equity policies that promote the equal representation of men and women are in place, much remains to be done.

Drawing from major findings of the study, the following specific recommendations are forwarded to pertinent stakeholders.

One of the ways to ensure the future of women's leadership lies in an increased societal participation in the form of national and international reorientation on the topic. Additionally, there needs to be a reforming of the educational system, an introduction of policies and initiatives that are more moderate and favorable to women

Further, leadership training and development for women within the organization, the society, and the grassroots level can help groom more women leaders, particularly when the government, businesses, and the society at large realize that inclusion is essential in growing and nourishing economic success based on the 2015 report from African Development Bank. Other recommendations include women education /education of the girl child mentoring and more research, which will provide needed information on this issue; it will also help to determine the measures that need to be taken to improve the amount of women leaders in different sectors. Further, there should be a public reporting obligation in regard to the composition as well as changes that took place on the organization's board during the year.

Finally, women's groups and other professional bodies can apply pressure to affect change. and women should also be bold and possess enough confidence to apply for board positions. Further, there is a need to involve more fathers and sons in this process (DiLanzo, 2016); there need to be training and awareness dedicated to ensuring that they understand the need for women's role in the decision-making process and leadership.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am truthfully grateful to my supervisor, Professor Chen Zhixia for her continuous support of my PhD study and research, her patience, motivation, enthusiasm and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time to my academic progress and motivated me to put more efforts in this work and in my academic life.

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