ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN A SELECTED STATE UNIVERSITY IN ZIMBABWE: A FEMINIST CAPABILITIES APPROACH

Annah Moyo
Department of Educational Policy Studies and Leadership
Midlands State University, Zimbabwe
moyoan@staff.msu.ac.zw

Wonder Muchabaiwa
Department of Educational Policy Studies and Leadership
Midlands State University, Zimbabwe
muchabaiwaw@staff.msu.ac.zw

Abstract
Despite international efforts towards gender equality, universities in developing countries including Zimbabwe continue to grapple with underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. The glass ceiling remains an impediment for women in universities in developing countries. This study explores the lived experiences and perspectives of female leaders and prospective female leaders in Zimbabwean state universities. The study adopts the feminist capability lens to illuminate the complexities and nuances of challenges that obstruct female academics to assume leadership positions. This qualitative study adopted a sequential exploratory design and collected data through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document reviews selected state universities. The findings highlight the deeply entrenched cultural values gender stereotypes that continue to disproportionally disadvantage prospective female leaders in universities. Such stereotypes include belief in mancho masculine attributes for leaders, women's domestic responsibilities and lack of support and role models. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions, including policy changes, leadership development programs, and initiatives to address work-life balance and support prospective female leaders. This study thus contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender equality in higher education, offering valuable insights for policymakers, university administrators, and scholars working towards a more inclusive future for African universities.

Keywords: female leaders, gender intersectionality, feminist capability approach, glass ceiling, state universities, Zimbabwe

Introduction
Gender inequality in higher education particularly with reference to leadership positions has remained elusive in developing countries despite several efforts to redress the historical imbalances. While national policies and international conventions promote

equal opportunities, women continue to face significant barriers to achieving leadership positions within universities (Chanda & Ngulube, 2024). Over the years, feminist discourse has been projected as a conceptual framework to redress the perceived historical social and gender injustices. Zimbabwe has not only enacted laws that promote gender equality (Equal opportunities Act, 2002; Domestic Violence Act, 2007) but also ratified regional and international legal frameworks (The SADC protocol on gender, Convention on the Elimination of all forms Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW) that advocate gender equality in all social, economic and political spheres. In African universities, it would seem the varied feminist discourses and subsequent legal reforms have not achieved the intended objectives as positions of authority have remained largely male dominated. In the context of Zimbabwe, literature suggests that despite gender policies aimed at fulfilling national goals, such as the National Gender Policy of 2013 and international conventions advocating for 50:50 representation across sectors including education, gender disparities persist (Chanda & Ngulube, 2024; Lyons & Zhang, 2023). Despite an increasing presence of women in faculty roles, leadership positions in Zimbabwe' state universities remain male dominated. This study aims to shed light on the nuanced lived experiences of prospective female leaders and female leaders in Zimbabwean universities. Further, we employ a feminist capability lens to illuminate the agency and capabilities women aspiring leadership roles. Since women are not a homogenous group, we consider intersectionality as factors like background, race, class and academic discipline tend to intersect with gender shaping women's realities and opportunities to assume leadership roles in the higher education.

Background

The challenges experienced by female academics seem to take a global trend. Globally, women hold just 28.2 per cent of management positions in the workplace (UN Women, 2023). This gender disparity in leadership positions permeates institutions in higher education in both developed and developing countries. Gender disparity refers to the differences women and men face particularly in their ability to access resources, advancement and professional statuses (Baker & Osanloo, 2022). In higher education gender disparity is demonstrated by the differences in which women are represented in leadership positions, their ability to experience career advancement (O'Connor, 2011). According to Meza-Mejia, Villarreal-Garcia and Ortega-Barba (2023), 18% of university rectors are women in nine Latin America countries, while only 15% are women in 48 European countries of which 20 did not have any female leaders. A systematic review on the barriers and facilitators to success for female academics in UK Higher Education by Westoby, Dyson, Cowdell and Buescher (2021) revealed a

disquieting narrative of continued biases, barriers, double-standards, and unsupportive work environments for women academics.

Meanwhile female researchers at higher education institutions represent 39, 7% of the world' total. For female prospective leaders in higher education there seems to be a glass ceiling to leadership positions. The glass ceiling refers to the seemingly invisible barriers women are faced with that prevent their advancement and achieving leadership positions (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). In many countries the representation of women tends to decrease as academic ranks progress and few women reach senior and leadership positions within higher education institutions (Galán-Muros, Bouckaert &Roser, 2023). However, in the global north there seems to be a shift to be a shift as more and more women are assuming leadership roles in higher education. For example, in Austria, regulation was introduced in 2009 to require university bodies such as the senate and other commissions to meet a quota of 40% female members. The quota was raised to 50% in 2014. By 2016 all but one of the university councils had fulfilled this quota (UNESCO IESALC, 2022).

Yahya, Anwar & Zaki (2024) confirm that immediate and effective measures are being taken in the West to promote women's academic leadership, whereas Eastern countries appear to be in dire need of realising the importance of women's active contributions to decision-making, as indicated by fewer studies coming from Asian contexts grappling with a wider gender gap. The dilemma seems persistent in developing where policies are failing to enhance gender equality in higher education. Change in higher education across the globe is taking place at an unprecedented pace. Various groups, especially women, are impacted differently by these changes. Women remain underrepresented in leadership at universities across the globe, and South African higher education is no different (Schreiber & Zinn, 2023). For women to take up senior leadership roles more potently in universities, particularly in the Global South, it is essential that they not only cope with and compete in the patriarchal systems that characterize this sector but are also emboldened to contribute to changing patriarchal hegemony. Cultural norms and attitudes remain a major barrier for women advancing into leadership positions (Joshi & Misangyi, 2018). Cultural and structural conditions and practices impact on GE leadership in HEIs.

A study conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa by Semela, Bekele and Abraham (2020) showed that women's entry into, and success in academia is impacted by a complex set of factors ranging from hegemonic gender beliefs that trigger the use of double standards disfavouring women to deliberate exclusion during selection, employment, promotion, and appointment in leadership positions. In cultures that emphasize women's roles as subservient, these values may

discourage women from working or seeking leadership positions to begin with (Kiamba, 2009).

In cases where women seek to advance in the workplace, they are often faced with an organizational culture that subjects' women in the workplace to sexual harassment, relegates women to secretarial duties and leadership only in certain roles, like human resources, and undervalues their expertise (Haile et al., 2016; Joshi, 2014; Joshi & Misangyi, 2018). Another study by Moodly (2015) in South Africa reveals that gender equity (GE) in relation to the representation of women forms part of policy within South African legislature, as part of a democratic society. Despite GE policy, leadership within Higher Education (HE) is still male dominated. Her findings reveal that gender equity is not practiced within HE leadership and suggest that HE leadership is male dominated; with the glass ceiling a reality for women. Wheeler and Wiese (2024) observe that some male colleagues prefer to work solely with other male colleagues, resulting in women being sidelined and feeling voiceless. Female employees reported being harassed by students and having difficulty managing professional and family life. TA discussion based on a literature review is presented, reflecting that cultural and structural conditions and practices impact on GE leadership in HEIs

Report by the Zimbabwe Women's University Network (ZWUN) (2018) confirm that women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions in Zimbabwean universities. Although women constitute a larger proportion of academic staff, they occupy limited posts of Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Head of Department (UNESCO, 2021). In the same vein, report on the First National State of Gender Equality in Zimbabwe (2016), underscores that women remain underrepresented in leadership. More so, UNESCO data (2014-2016) Global Gender Gap Report 2022 ranked Zimbabwe 129th out of 146 countries overall gender parity score. According to Muchabaiwa and Chauraya (2022), in Zimbabwean higher education, the Education 5.0 framework is gender blind and tends to diminish female academics' prospects for promotion into leadership positions. This study thus interrogates why women continue to be underrepresented leadership despite efforts by feminist movements and the state to institute legal reforms that promote gender equality. We explore the missing link that continues to precipitate gender inequalities in leadership in higher education. Women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions within Zimbabwean state universities. There seems to be a gap between existing gender policies and their effective implementation in higher education. This study explores the lived experiences of prospective female leaders and female leaders in a Zimbabwean state university to understand the obstacles they face and identify opportunities for promoting gender equality

To understand the nuances of contextual cultural practices, as well as structural norms and values obstructing female academics' career progression, the study applies the feminist capability approach.

Conceptual Framework: The Feminist Capabilities Approach and Power Dynamics
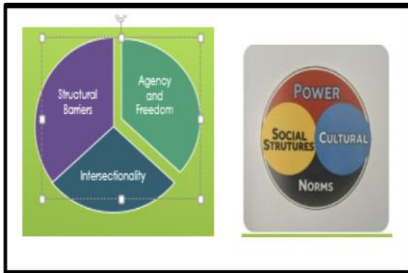
The framework offers a valuable lens for analysing power dynamics and gender inequalities within Zimbabwean state universities. According to Sen (1999), the capability approach includes key elements of capabilities (or opportunities), the *functioning's* (or outcomes) that flow from them along with the *conversion factors* that influence the capability set and the *adaptive preferences* that inform choices. The feminist capability approach (FCA) provides insights into how structural barriers, social norms, and institutional practices shape women's capabilities and choices within academia. It further provides a better understanding of the interplay between cultural norms and power dynamics that influences the real opportunities (capabilities) of the female academics to access leadership opportunities of their choice. Intersectionality within the FCA framework acknowledges the complex interplay of gender with other social categories, such as race, class, and ethnicity. By extension, FCA creates a robust framework that illuminates the nuances and complexities of gender intersectionality, gender dynamics and patriarchal tendencies that obstruct women's career pathways. It enriches our understanding of women's experiences in higher education. Generally, Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society hence male dominance in higher education is a reflection of the social and cultural milieu.

Research questions

What are the lived experiences of prospective female leaders and female leaders within Zimbabwean state universities?

How have gender norms and power dynamics contributed to the obstruction of women's capabilities and agency in leadership roles?

What are the prospects and opportunities for promoting gender justice and fostering women's empowerment in universities?

What actionable policies, practices can be proposed address gender disparities and empower women in leadership roles in universities?

Research Methodology

The qualitative study adopted a sequential exploratory research design where in-depth interviews with key

informants were preceded by focused group discussions with prospective female leaders in universities, and document reviews showing female academics in leadership positions. The qualitative research approach guided the process of collecting, presenting and analysing data on the lived experiences of prospective female leaders and female leaders in state universities. The approach allowed an in-depth exploration of the experiences, attitudes, feelings and perceptions of the research participants on the nuances and complexities in gender and power dynamics in state universities (Neuman 2014:51). It allowed deep insights into cultural and structural barriers to women' promotion to positions of authority and leadership in universities. Document reviews, focused group discussions and in-depth interviews allowed multiple voices to be heard, provided a more holistic picture of the research issue being investigated and allowed for triangulation of data for reliability and trustworthiness as data from different sources that can be compared and any inconsistencies followed up on. Data from multiple sources provide means to develop defendable conclusions on challenges obstacles obstructing female academics to assume leadership positions. The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is a strategy to add rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to the inquiry.

Sampling

Participants for this study were identified mostly through purposive and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling has several other names-chain referrals, reputational or network sampling (Neuman, 2014) or rhizome sampling (Schutt, 2007). Snowball sampling is used with difficult-to-reach participants, particularly prospective female students who participated in focus group discussions. One of the strengths of snowball sampling is its efficiency in finding sites or persons whose attributes are central to the research problem (Creswell, 2017). In order to avoid the weakness of bias (identification by respondents of people similar to them in circumstances) inherent in this method several snowballs were used. Thus, three focus groups with 10 prospective female leaders in state universities were identified through snowballing. The study also purposively sampled six female leaders in state universities. Although the thrust of the study was on prospective and incumbent female leaders in state universities, we also sought perceptions of four male leaders in state universities on the research issue. This served as a leverage against bias by female participants. The sample thus comprised 40 research participants.

Data Collection Methods
In-depth Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)
In-depth interviews were held with six female leaders and four male leaders in state universities. The purpose of the key informant interviews was to get a

more in-depth discussion on the lived experiences of female academic in state universities especially obstacles and prospects for women's promotion to leadership positions in higher education. The discussions followed up on some issues raised in focus group discussions which needed further clarification by the female academics already in positions of leadership. In-depth interviews delved in detail into cultural norms and power dynamics that influence allocation of positions of leadership in state universities. We also sought insights into possible strategies and prospects for women's promotion to leadership positions in state universities.

Participatory Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions were conducted with three groups of prospective female leaders in state universities. The discussion focused on students' perceptions on the lived experiences of the prospective female leaders, particularly the challenges that have kept them away from assuming positions of leadership. We also sought insights into possible prospects for breaking the glass ceiling, allowing prospective female leaders to assume leadership positions on an equal footing with their male counterparts.

More data were collected through document reviews to establish the existing statistics on female academics in leadership positions in state universities.

Data Analysis

The study adopted an interpretive analysis model which helped in establishing emerging patterns or themes from the collected data. Gall et al (2007:466) and Cohen et al (2007:86) describe interpretive analysis as the process of examining a case study closely in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied. Braun and Clarke (2006) elaborate that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question. We thus analysed the data set collected through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and document reviews and then coded the data which addressed specific research questions or emerging themes.

Ethical consideration

The study took cognisant of the sensitive nature of the phenomenon under study and thus observed a number of research ethics. The study sought informed consent from research participants and the informed consent form was completed by the participants. In this regard before every interview, we explained to the participant the purpose of the study, its benefits to higher education and how long each interview would take. We also explained that participating in the interviews was entirely voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw at any stage. Since some of the reasons given by participants pointed to negative attitude by senior leadership, it was very important to maintain confidentiality and privacy of the participants. Participants wanted

convincing assurance of the confidentiality of the information given and those who declined to participate in the interviews did so because they suspected that they could be reported to university authorities. To protect the anonymity of research participants, we generalised responses by the participants and used data aggregates.

Findings

The study sought to solicit the lived experiences of prospective female leaders and female leaders in Zimbabwean state universities. Although several legal frameworks and gender policies in state universities have been instituted, there seems to be a disjuncture between policy and practice. Leadership and management in most state universities have remained largely male dominated demonstrating the deeply entrenched masculine hegemonic power dynamics. From a feminist capabilities approach, prospective female leaders and incumbent female leaders tend to be denied opportunities to explore career pathways of their choice. According to Sen (1999), the capability approach includes key elements of capabilities (or opportunities), the *functioning's* (or outcomes) that flow from them along with the *conversion factors* that influence the capability set and the *adaptive preferences* that inform choices. Denying female academics opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities and agency in leadership roles works against the spirit of sustainable development goal 5:

gender equality and women empowerment.

The Mismatch between Policy and Practice

Data from in-depth interviews with key informants (female leaders in state universities) and focus group discussions with prospective female leaders in state universities reveals that there is a mismatch between police and practice. Female academics continue to be elbowed in leadership positions. An interview with one senior manager in one state university reveals:

The issue of gender equality in state universities' leadership remains a myth. In Zimbabwe, there are 14 state universities and seven private universities. For these institutions, only two have female Vice Chancellors, one at a state university and the other at a private university. The rest have male Vice Chancellors. That alone shows that power dynamics favour a masculine trajectory.

In another interview, one female middle manager shared her sentiments;

As a country we have done very well in putting in place legal frameworks and policies that propagate the gender equality narrative. From experience, I know that every state university has a gender policy. The objective of the gender policy is to ensure gender balance in recruitment, promotion and retention of staff. Unfortunately, the policies and practices do not match. Very few academics have made it to leadership positions.

When asked how she managed to secure a leadership post as a dean, she had this to say;

If you are a woman and you aspire to be in leadership or management, you have to work extra hard. You put double the effort put by men in every aspect. This despite as women we have other domestic responsibilities that interfere with paid work. For example, if they demand 15 publications, you need to ensure that you 20 or more. You need to ensure that that they are left without any excuse to deny you.

Sentiments on existing policies in state universities by female leaders came out as follows;

It is true that we policies that guide the recruitment and promotion process but these are not usually adhered to. The recruitment and promotion policies actually give preferential treatment to female candidates. Some policies like the Education 5.0 and faculty ordinances are silent on issues of gender equality. More so, the gender policies in universities are not applied to the letter and spirit of the policy. It's the reason we have female leaders in universities.

One participant in focus group discussion shared her sentiments:

I have a lot of university experience and have the requisite qualifications but I have tried in vain applying for the post of the department chair. In some cases, they allow members to vote for a candidate to the position of the chairperson and many times it has been a male candidate voted for. The reason is that there are more male faculty members.

Another participant weighed in;

In our faculty, there are five departments and only one chairperson is female. This is despite the fact that the gender policy stipulates that at least 50% of decision makers at all levels should female.

The mismatch between policy and practice has been consistently noted from the sentiments by female leaders. Generally, gender policies in different state universities have clearly stated objectives which promote gender equality in recruitment and promotion processes (Zembere, 2022). Obstacles to women's promotion point to the existence of a glass ceiling in state universities that obstruct female' academics' career progression. According to Coetzee & Moosa (2020) the glass ceiling refers to the seemingly invisible barriers women are faced with that prevent their advancement and achieving leadership positions. When looked at from a feminist capabilities approach, the glass ceiling obstructs women's capabilities and agency in assuming leadership positions of their choice in state universities. It demonstrates power dynamics entrenched in gender norms where a masculine identity is perceived to be appropriate for leadership positions. However further analysis reveals that contemporary leadership is synonymous with feminine attributes. Franklin (2014) contends that there is a shift in gender relations organisations with feminine attributes perceived as appropriate for effective leadership and development.

Gender Stereotyped Leadership Positions in State Universities

Perception from the research participants demonstrate the existence of a patriarchal hegemony in state universities. Unlike institutions of higher education in the developed world, where female candidates are

gradually assuming positions of leadership (Bothwell, 2020; Meza-Mejia et al, 2023; Bowen, 2024), universities in Africa have remained stuck in the male dominated structures in universities. In traditional African societies leadership positions are a preserve for men (Batool & Sajid, 2013). Such gender stereotypes tend to be replicated in higher education institutions in Zimbabwe. The following interview excerpts with male leaders in state universities are revealing:

Women do not make good leaders because they are too empathetic, less assertive, less commanding, and less aggressive and can easily panic. Many of them can hardly forecast into the future and plan accordingly. For the few female leaders that I have worked with, I have found them to be inconsistent in decision making.

Leadership is a critical role that should not be left to women who are sluggish and less adaptive to the ever-changing world. Their motherly approach may not steer progress and development in higher education. Many of them confidence and tend to consult subordinates too much. Leadership entails incisive and insightful decisions, attributes which tend to lack in many women. Generally, male academics resent taking orders from women, making female leaders' situation difficult.

One major weakness I have observed with female leaders is that they tend to be too patient with struggling subordinates. They can't make bold decisions like firing incompetent subordinates. Many of them use emotions and the brain and yet leadership is about making objective and unattached decisions guided by statutory instruments.

Contrary to the perceptions and sentiments shared by male leaders in state universities, feminine attributes have been perceived to be synonymous with effective leadership. According to Frankel (2014), masculine mancho personalities are more likely to be less effective in leadership as they tend to create resentment and resistance by subordinates. Frankel further observes that contemporary societies now envisage leaders who are inclusive, empathetic, listen, reward rather than punish, encourage rather than disparage; leaders who specifically exhibit more stereotypically feminine characteristics. By extension, such observations call for rethinking masculinity and presuppose that the future is feminine. Leadership based on the aforementioned feminine qualities is more likely to be effective as it draws its mandate from the subordinates. In the contemporary society, the traditional masculine mancho personalities which rely on intimidation, coercion and aggression (toxic masculinities) are likely to precipitate resentment and resistance in subordinates. From this perspective, the assumption that the future is feminine is sustainable. By extension, men are put to disadvantage by cultural gender stereotypes (Frankel, 2014) which require them to exude mancho like personalities which are incongruent with expectations of the modern society where the mandate of leadership is drawn from people. Women are likely to be effective leaders because they consult, they are empathetic, and considerate, hence they draw their mandate from the subordinates. However, several studies

show that women are kept away from leadership positions by hegemonic patriarchal power dynamics (Elmuti, Jia & Davis, 2009; Batool & Sajid, 20013; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). From a feminist capabilities approach, one can argue that women's capabilities and choices are marginalised by gender norms that accord men preferential access to leadership positions. Inadvertently state universities miss out on utilising feminine leadership attributes to steer change and development in their institutions.

Family-Work Conflict as a barrier to Leadership roles

In developing countries, women continue to bear the burden of domestic chores alone. In the developed countries, shifts in gender relations are noticeable as more and more men are now willing to assist their spouses with domestic work (Voicu, Voicu & Strapcova, 2006; Sani, 2014). Female academics in Zimbabwean state universities are complaining that domestic chores continue to obstruct opportunities to assume leadership roles. When looked at from a feminist capabilities approach (Sen, 1999), domestic chores tend to compromise women's leadership capabilities and freedom to choose career pathways. One participant in a focus group discussion shared her sentiments:

Like anyone else, as female academics we aspire leadership and decision-making positions. However, due to the demands of domestic chores, we don't have ample time to pursue studies and acquire higher qualifications. We are always juggling home and work activities trying to balance them.

Another participant weighed in and added:

Domestic chores stand in the way of women' career progression. There is just too much work for one person in the home. We need a helper but unfortunately, we can't afford her wage. The burden becomes worse when you are pregnant or nursing a baby. The most unfortunate part is that my husband like many African husbands does not want to help with domestic chores.

Similar sentiments were shared by another participant in a focus group discussion:

My situation is much worse because my husband is no longer employed. It's unimaginable that after work I have to engage in another shift on domestic chores while my husband is just seated waiting to be served with food. I think it's time we have shifts in gender relations so that men can work in the kitchen as well.

From a feminist capabilities approach, domestic chores tend to stand in the way of women's capabilities and agency obstructing their freedom to assume leadership positions (Sen, 1999). According to Awung and Dorasamy (2015), African men are not yet prepared to share domestic chores, despite the fact that women have penetrated the work place. For African men, working in the kitchen is perceived as a taboo (Cerrato, 2018) and men who attempt to do so are derided as feminine. Juxtaposing African culture and western culture we see that in the western there been a

significant shift in gender relations where many men now cooperate working in the kitchen. From this standpoint, Leadership positions for female academics in state universities become elusive as they struggle to balance domestic chores with demanding leadership roles. As argued earlier, feminine attributes are becoming more congruent with effective leadership (Frankel, 2014). Thus, state university tend to lose out on a pool of talented women to steer progress and development in academia.

Another female leader aspirant observed:

In this university, there is a certain group of women afford to grab every leadership opportunity that emerges. They are found across faculties and have advantages over other women. The same group of women have many leadership responsibilities while the rest of struggle to break the glass ceiling.

The sentiments above draw our attention to the notion of gender intersectionality. Women are not a homogenous group, they have varied socio-economic backgrounds, races and ethnic identities (Shields, 2008; Christoffersen, 2021). When gender intersects with class, those coming from poor socio-economic backgrounds are doubly affected. Elsewhere in Norway and New Zealand, they have developed the term 'golden skirts' referring to women who have access to every leadership opportunity, especially as board directors ((Grab et al, 2020; ILO, 2020; Grima, 2022). However, the

term 'golden skirts' in itself is derogatory, insinuating sexual harassment. From a gender intersectionality perspective, female academic from a poor socio-economic background struggle to secure leadership positions first because they are women and that they come from a low economic class.

Prospects and opportunities for aspirant female leaders

Aspirant female leaders in state universities proposed several strategies to ensure gender equality in distributing leadership roles. During engagement in focus group discussions one of them proposed:

The affirmative action policy may be revamped to emphasise preferential access to leadership positions by female academics with requisite qualifications. The current policy focuses on preferential access to disciplines of study by female students. Voting people to offices of leadership has always worked against aspiring female leaders.

Another participant weighed in:

The first step is to conduct gender audits and implement gender mainstreaming strategies. However, men's attitudes towards women's capabilities should be dealt with and ensure they have a buy-in to gender mainstreaming strategies. A shift in mind-set for male academics is critical for successful implementation of any strategy to increase women's access to leadership positions.

My thinking is that we have quite robust gender policies at national level. What is lacking is the implementation. I propose that a female minister of higher education would be ideal to steer the gender equality in universities. For example, the gender quota system is very clear, what is

lacking is the political will.

Zimbabwe as a country should align with global trends where shifts in gender relations have become a reality. In contemporary society, opening opportunities for women to access leadership positions is inevitable and desirable if we are to achieve the development goals by 2030. Frankel (2014) demonstrated that feminine like being empathetic, consultative, and collaborative and being patient have become congruent with leadership styles. Masculine mancho characteristics that rely on intimidation, commanding, authoritarian and coercion may precipitate resentment and resistance by subordinates. Thus, from a feminist capabilities approach, women's capabilities are being obstructed the deeply entrenched patriarchal hegemony in Zimbabwe's state universities.

Conclusions

From a feminist capabilities approach, women's potential and capabilities in leadership role tend to be stifled by a glass ceiling informed by a patriarchal hegemony. This explains why we have very few female academics in leadership positions in state universities. However, from a gender intersectionality view point, women are not a homogenous group, hence they are differentially affected by the glass ceiling. The study observed that there is a certain privileged group of women who have access to leadership role. The same women chaired several committees in different capacities confirming that gender intersectionality is a critical aspect for gender equality analysis in state universities. Elsewhere in Europe, these privileged women have been labelled 'golden skirts' depicting a special class of women who chair several boards (Grab et al, 2020; ILO, 2020; Grima, 2022). The study concludes that in contemporary society, feminine attributes are congruent with effective modern leadership styles. By implication, state universities lose out as they remain stuck in the traditional masculine mancho leadership styles.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings above, the study makes the following recommendations:

Affirmative action policy and other gender policies should emphasise the importance of gender inclusivity in distributing leadership positions in state universities. Implementation should be made compulsory by the ministry of higher education. n the same vein periodic gender audits should be enforced to reflect 50-50 representation policy.

There is need to make men part of the processes of gender mainstreaming leadership positions in state universities. Dismantling the patriarchal hegemony by university authorities becomes imminent, inevitable and desirable. A shift in men's mind-set to embrace women as leaders should be emphasised through seminars and workshops. Above all, the aspect of gender intersectionality

should be infused in all gender mainstreaming strategies. The feminist capabilities approach should be applied to illuminate appointment procedures in state universities. The approach acknowledges women's capabilities as leaders and enlighten that feminine attributes are more congruent with contemporary leadership styles.

References

Awung, M. & Dorasamy, N. (2015). The impact of domestic chores on the career progression of women in higher education: The case the Durban University of Technology. *Environmental Economics.* 6(4):94-102.

Baker, S.J. & Onsloo, A.F. (2022). To Dean, or Not to Dean? Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership. 25 (2):195-209

Batool, S.Q. & Sajid, M.A. (2013). Barriers faced by women managers at universities. *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research.* 13(3):202-232

Bowen, M. (2024). Women in Leadership positions in Higher Education: Challenges, Opportunities, Strategies for success. MS. Leadership 125: https://scholars.unh/ms-leadership/125

Chanda, T.C. & Ngulube, L. (2024): Women in Leadership: Examining Barriers to Women's Advancement in Leadership positions. Asian journal of Advanced Research and Reports. 18(6): 273-290: ISSN:2582-32X8

Cerrato, J. & Cifre, E. (2018). Gender inequalities in Household chores and Work-family Conflict. *Front. Psychol*. 9:1330. Doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01330.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K (2007). *Research Methods in Education*. *Approaches.* 7th edition. Essex: Pearson Education

Coetzee, M. & Moosa, (2020). Leadership contingencies in the retention of women in higher education. SA Journal of Human Resources Management. 18 (4): Doi: 10.4102/sajhmv18

Creswell, J. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods.* *Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications

Christoffersen, A. (2021). Intersectionality in Practice: Research Findings for practitioners and Policy Makers, The University of Edinburgh.

Elmuti, D. Jia, H. & Davies, H.H. (2009). Challenges Women Face in Leadership Positions and organisational Effectiveness: An Investigation, Journal of Leadership Education.8 (2): 167-187.

Frankel, L. (2014). *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office: Unconscious Mistakes Women Make That Sabotage Their Careers* (A NICE GIRLS Book) Paperback

Galán-Muros, V, Bouckaert, M, & Roser-Chinchilla, J. (2023). The representation of women in academia and higher education management positions: policy brief. UNESCO-IESALC policy brief series [2]

Gall, M., Gall, J. & Borg, W. (2007). *Educational Research: An Introduction.* Boston: Pearson, Allyn and Bacon.

Grau, P. Cabo, R.M., Gimeno, R. & Olmedo, E. (2020). Networks of Boards of

Directors: Is the 'Golden Skirts' only an illusion? *Non-Linear Dynamics Psychology and Life Sciences*. 24(2):215-231.

Grima, S. (2022). Board Gender Diversity in Maltese Equity-listed and Large Public Sector Entities. European Research Studies Journal 35(2):555-586.

ILO (2020). Improving Gender Diversity I company boards; Women in Business Management. www.ilo.org/employer

Neuman, W.L. (2014). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.*7thedition. Essex: Pearson Education

Howe-Walsh, L & Turnbull, S. (2016) Barriers to women leaders in academia: tales from science and technology, Studies in Higher Education, 41:3, 415-428, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2014.929102

Muchabaiwa, W. & Chauraya, E. (2022). The Gender Blindness of the Education 5.0 Framework: An Obstruction to promotion opportunities for female academics in Zimbabwe. *Management in Education*. https//doi.org/10.1177/08920206221126640 Sage 9

Lyons, E. & Zhang, L. (2023). Female Entrepreneurs. Digital tool, and Work-life Balance from Small Businesses around the world.https://ssrn.com/abstract=453646

Meza-Mejia, M.C., Villarreal-Garca, M.A., & Ortega-Barba, C.F. (2023). Women and Leadership in Higher Education: A Systematic Review. Social Sciences 12:555. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsciene 1200555

Moodly, A. (2015). Gender Equity in South African Higher Education Leadership: Where Are We Twenty Years after Democracy. Journal of Social Sciences. DOI 10.1080/09718923.2015.11893410

Sani, G.M.D. (2014). Men's Employment hours and Time on Domestic Chores in European Countries. Journal of Family Issues. 35(8):1023-1047. Doi: 101177/0192513x14522245

Semela, T., Bekele, H. & Abraham, R. (2020) Navigating the river Nile: the chronicle of female academics in Ethiopian higher education, *Gender and Education*, 32:3, 328- 346, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2017.140052

Shields, S.A. (2008). Gender an Intersectionality Perspective. *Sex Roles*. 59(5):301-311.

Sen, A. (1999). Development as Freedom. New York: Knopf

UN Women (2023). Women in power in 2023. New Data shows progress but wide regional gaps. https://unwomen.org/en/news

Voicu, M., Voicu, B. & Strapcova, K. (2006). House work and Gender inequality across Europe: IRISS Working Paper Series 2006-11. https://ideas.repec.org/p/irs/irisiop/2006-11. html

Westoby, C., Dyson, J. Cowdell, F. & Buescher, T. (2021). What are the barriers and facilitators to success for female academics in UK HEIs? A narrative review, *GenderandEducation,* 33:8, 10331056, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.202 1.1 884198

Yahya, U., Anwar, R.H. &Zaki, S. (2024). Women Leaders in Higher Education. A Systematic Review offering insights with wider gender gaps. Issues in Educational Research. 34 (1): 378-399.

Zembere, M. (2022). Gendered Leadership in Zimbabwe's Institutions of Higher Education: A Call for Decolonisation of equality and justice. *International journal of Research and Innovation in Social Sciences*. 6(9):332-335