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STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING GENDER PARITY IN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UNIVERSITIES IN MBEYA (TANZANIA) AND ASSAM (INDIA)

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ABSTRACT

Background and Aim: Gender disparity in leadership is a global problem; despite efforts to reduce inequalities, yet significant inequalities persist in the leadership positions worldwide. This study aimed to investigate strategies to achieve gender parity in academic leadership in universities of Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. The study was guided by the Social Role Theory with the notion behind that gender differences are driven by the social roles than biological differences. **Materials and Methods:** A mixed-methods approach employing a convergent research design was used in this study. The target population consisted of university teachers and academic leaders from universities in Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. A total sample of 277 participants was obtained, comprising 261 university teachers and 16 academic leaders. Among the university teachers, 119 were from Mbeya, Tanzania, and 142 were from Assam, India; these participants were selected using incidental convenience sampling. The 16 academic leaders, consisting of 8 from Mbeya, Tanzania, and 8 from Assam, India, were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires administered to university teachers and semi-structured interviews conducted with academic leaders. **Results:** The study found that developing and implementing policies for equal representation is a strategy for achieving gender parity in academic leadership positions in the universities of Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that the development and effective implementation of policies that promote equal representation are essential for achieving gender parity in academic leadership positions in the universities of Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. Institutional policies that ensure equitable opportunities for leadership participation can help address long-standing gender imbalances and create a more inclusive governance structure. However, the effectiveness of these policies depends on consistent enforcement, institutional commitment, regular monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. Therefore, universities should strengthen gender-responsive policies and integrate them into leadership recruitment, promotion, and decision-making processes to foster sustainable gender equality in academic leadership.

Keywords: Gender parity; Leadership; Academic Leadership; Universities

Introduction

Gender disparity in leadership is a pervasive issue that impacts various sectors, including higher education institutions (Silva, et al. 2026). The study by Okoro (2025) demonstrated that gender equality remains a serious challenge in higher education globally. The study by Seva-Larrosa et al. (2026) highlighted that there is a persistent male dominance in leadership positions than females. Wang (2024) showed that, despite the rise of female leaders at departmental and faculty levels, they remain underrepresented at the senior level. Organizations like the Global Gender Gap Index and the European Institute for Gender Equality monitor improvements in leadership, economic opportunities, health, and education (Machorro, & Trujillo-Reyes, 2025). However according to Lahiri et al. (2026) in senior managerial, executive, and strategic leadership positions are less represented by females across sectors. The study by Diab et al. (2024) found that in the position of VC, females were only 13%, and dean's position, they were only 30%.

In India, according to Lata (2026) Gender bias in India continues to be a significant barrier to achieving equity in higher education institutions, female representation in senior faculty positions, leadership roles, and research grant allocations remains disproportionately low. Several studies including Nandi et al. (2026) demonstrated that all positions in universities, gender gap persist though has reduced from 22.03% to 13.11%, reflecting increasing female representation. Talkudar (2025) found that in Assam, India, the overall representation in university academic leadership was 66.33% males and 33.6% females.

In Tanzania, although national frameworks such as the National Gender Policy, gender mainstreaming structures at universities, the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, affirmative action provisions and the Education and Training Policy provide a strong legal foundation for promoting gender equality, gaps still persist in senior academic ranks, research participation and leadership (Matete et al. 2026; Mwendah & Killian, 2025). The study by Mtekele (2024) found that females in technical institutions are underrepresented in educational leadership, especially in top positions in Tanzania. Studies conducted in India and Tanzania, including those by Nandi et al. (2026), Matete et al. (2026), and Mwendah and Killian (2025), consistently demonstrate the persistence of gender disparities in academic leadership positions. The underrepresentation of female in these leadership roles limits their participation and influence in institutional decision-making processes. In response to this challenge, the present study was conducted to identify strategies for achieving gender parity in academic leadership within universities in Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India.

A. Objectives

The present study was conducted to identify strategies for achieving gender parity in academic leadership within universities in Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. The study was guided by one objective

- To develop strategies for enhancing gender parity in academic leadership in universities in Mbeya, Tanzania and Assam, India

B. Research Question

The study was guided by one research question

- What strategies can be developed to enhance gender parity in academic leadership in universities in Mbeya, Tanzania and Assam, India?

Literature review

The literature review, reviewed studies conducted on causes of gender disparities in leadership and studies on strategies to achieve gender parity in leadership.

a) Causes of gender disparities in leadership positions

The study reviewed studies conducted globally, in India and Tanzania on causes of gender disparities in leadership as table 1 shows.

Table 1: *Studies Conducted on Causes of gender disparities in leadership*
Studies Conducted Globally

SN	Authors and year	Findings	Limitations
1.	Oakley (2000)	Few females are in leadership due to gender-based stereotypes.	Based on existing theories and literature rather than primary data collection
2.	Batool et al. (2013)	Domestic responsibilities cause unequal representation in leadership.	Reliance on secondary data
3.	Reis (2015)	Career development and family life cause unequal representation.	Narrow geographical scope restricted generalization and reliance on subjective self-reporting.
4.	Segkulu & Gyimah (2016)	Qualification, traditional beliefs, and cultural practices cause gender disparities.	Employed structured questionnaires, which limited the depth of qualitative insights
5.	Bernal et al. (2017)	Parenthood causes unequal representation in leadership.	Small sample size, only six participants, the findings cannot be generalized
6.	Dang (2017)	Culture and certainty of sexism cause gender disparities in leadership positions.	Small sample size, which included few participants from Mekong.
7.	Addama (2017)	The dominance of males in universities causes inequalities in leadership positions.	Reliance on pre-existing data
8.	Haidar (2018)	Male stereotypes and discrimination cause unequal representation.	Limited by a small sample of twelve participants and reliance on subjective self-reporting
9.	Reilly (2021)	Household duties cause gender disparities in leadership positions.	Focused on few participants, the findings cannot be generalized
10.	Makanyi & Cheteni (2021)	Gender stereotypes, lack of network, and mentoring cause gender disparity.	Small sample size, only six participants, the findings cannot be generalized
11.	Savior (2022)	Unequal representation is attributed to a few females in professor rank.	Reliance on secondary data
12.	Dawa & Ugyen (2022)	Gender bias, lack of incentives, and family responsibilities cause unequal representation.	Limited to small sample size and self-reporting bias.

13. Sucuoglu & Nkudong (2023)	Lack of legislative and cultural factors cause gender disparities.	Scope limitation, the study focused on Bamenda only hence results may not apply to universities in other regions
14. Diab (2024)	Few females qualify for leadership appointments, which leads to unequal representation	Scope of data restricted to research intensive member network only
15. Alshami (2025)	Unfair leadership opportunities for females	Reliance on secondary data
16. Correa et al. (2025)	A lack of role models and work-life changes.	The limited number of participants
17. Mategeko, B., & Julius, A. (2026)	A lack of formal mentorship and opaque promotion processes	Its single-institution focus, reliance on qualitative self-reporting, and limited intersectional analysis

Studies Conducted in India

SN	Authors and year	Findings	Limitations
18.	Banker & Banker (2017)	Few females are in top leadership positions due to a lack of qualifications.	Reliance on secondary data sources
19.	Yadav & Lata (2018)	Gender discrimination causes unequal representation.	Involved only two participants which limit generalization of findings
20.	Gandhi & Seni (2020)	Organizational culture and lack of vision in policy cause unequal representation in leadership positions.	Subjective reporting due to use of interview
21.	Nidhinalwaya (2022)	Male dominance leads to gender gap in leadership positions.	Lack of field data due to reliance on conceptual overview
22.	Joseph & Joseph (2022)	Organizational culture, discrimination, and unequal power relations cause unequal representations.	Relies on secondary data lacks primary data

Studies Conducted in Tanzania

SN	Authors and year	Findings	Limitations
23.	Nyoni et al. (2017)	Masculine concepts dominate the leadership system and cause gender disparities.	Relied on subjective perceptions which can introduce individual response bias
24.	Nyoni & He (2019)	Society and organizations believe only males can make good leadership, leading to unequal representation.	Narrow scope of institutional case study
25.	Tarimo & Swai (2020)	Lack of mentors, opportunities, role models, and low self-confidence cause gender disparities in leadership.	Limited by a small sample size of 21 participants, and a qualitative interview-based design which restrict the generalizability of the findings

26. Mbogela & Kanukisya (2021)	Gender stereotypes, gender roles, lack of training, socialization, inadequate mentors, and lack of confidence are the causes of gender disparities	Limited number of participants
27. Kyauke (2022)	Lack of gender policy and social-cultural cause gender disparities.	Relied on qualitative data which restricted sample size and relied on person career and lived experiences
28. Mbaliki & Onyango (2022)	Gender bias during leadership appointments causes unequal representation.	Narrow geographic and demographic scope, focusing only on public secondary schools within a single municipality with a small sample size of 100

b) Achieving Gender Parity in Academic Leadership

The study reviewed studies conducted globally, in India and Tanzania on strategies to achieve gender parity in academic leadership as table 2 shows.

Table 2: Studies Conducted on Strategies to Achieve Gender Parity in Leadership

Studies Conducted Globally

SN	Authors and year	Findings	Limitations
1.	Macis (2017)	Proposed promoting policies to counter discrimination and cultural and social norms and practices that lead to unequal representation.	Lack of primary data
2.	Ademe & Singh (2015)	Create a conducive and friendly atmosphere to attract females to leadership	Narrow geographic focus
3.	Lucchetti et al. (2023)	suggested institutional policies like transparent hiring and promotion, unconscious bias training, and family-friendly measures	self-selection bias
4.	Abdi (2023)	Suggested adopting effective policies at the leadership level to improve organizational efficiency.	Reliance on pre-existing data
5.	Choge (2023)	Females improve self-confidence, seek training and coaching from female leaders, and stop cultural practices	Self-reporting bias
6.	Tutu & Moi (2024)	Policymakers develop and implement gender policies to	Reliance on self-reported survey responses can introduce subjective bias

		increase the representation of females in leadership.	
7.	Baroudi & Hojeij (2025)	suggested designing policies that support women's involvement in decision-making and promoting them to leadership positions	Small sample size of seven female educational leaders which limits the broad generalizability of findings
8.	Alshami (2025)	Structural adjustments to promote fair and equitable policies	Reliance on secondary data
9.	Okoro (2025)	Initiating sensitive policies, leadership training, and mentorship to promote females in leadership	Reliance on self-reporting
10.	Smith (2025)	Creating an environment that encourages equitable decision-making, implementing gender quotas, and integrating bias training into organizational culture.	Rely on survey can include personal bias
11.	Mategeko, B., & Julius, A. (2026)	Formalizing transparent promotion, establishing mentorship programs, and institutionalizing family-support systems	Its single-institution focus, reliance on qualitative self-reporting, and limited intersectional analysis

Studies Conducted in India

SN	Authors and year	Findings	Limitations
12.	Qadir (2021)	Promoting gender assortment and creating policies that enable males and females to balance leadership responsibilities	Reliance on secondary data
13.	Khan et al. (2023)	Suggested developing strategies and policies to promote gender equality in university leadership.	Involved only 37 participants which limit generalization of findings
14.	Jain (2020)	To impede the participation of females in leadership	Reliance on secondary data
15.	Gandhi & Seni (2020)	Creating a professional network for mentoring female leaders and capacity-building initiatives like female-only leadership development and training programs	Subjective reporting due to use of interview

Studies Conducted in Tanzania

SN	Authors and year	Findings	Limitations
16.	Nyoni et al. (2017)	Suggested managing programs that will increase the confidence and competence of females, formulating equal opportunity policy, recruitment, appointment, and promotions to consider females	Relied on subjective perceptions which can introduce individual response bias
17.	Nyoni & He (2019)	Recruiting and promotion processes should be transparent and creating a gender management system and networks for females	Narrow scope of institutional case study
18.	Hotay et al. (2021)	Recommended that different stakeholders, institutions, and activists think of educating the growing generation to consider themselves and treat each other equally without considering their gender differences as part of the strategy to escape from a culturally derived mindset.	Reliance on self-reported data, and limited geographical focus
19.	Kyauke (2022)	Creating a friendly and conducive academic working environment and establishing specialized research and publication grants for female academics.	Relied on qualitative data which restricted sample size and relied on person career and lived experiences

Theory guiding the study

The study was guided by the Social Role Theory which was developed by Alice Eagly in 1987. The notion behind the theory is that gender differences are driven by the social roles than biological differences (Eagly & Wood, 2012). According to Van-Lange et al. (2012) sex differences and similarities in behavior reflect gender roles benefits example males are more likely to be employed in authority positions and females are more likely to fill care taking roles at home, hence males and females are differently distributed depending on society's culture. Even in leadership due to gender differences males are dominating in leadership positions than females. The theory was used to analyze strategies to achieve gender parity in academic leadership in universities of Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India.

According to Diekman and Schneider (2010) societal stereotype influence perceptions of male and female dispositions, disparities emerge from the division of labour where the society expect males to hold assertive roles and females to hold nurturing roles. Omojemite (2024) highlighted that gender stereotypes play essential roles causing discrimination and inequality. Stating regarding strategies to achieve gender parity, the social role theory suggests encouraging shared responsibilities at home and workplace, influencing workplace roles and opportunity structures (Schneider & Bos, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework.

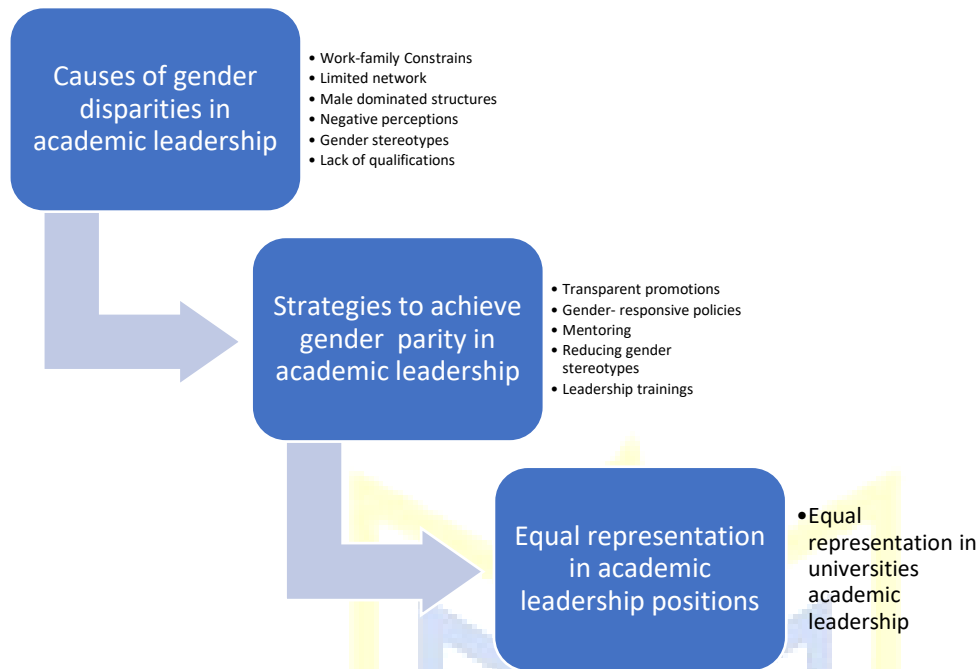


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Figure 1 above shows that work-family constrains, limited network, male dominated structures, negative perceptions, lack of qualifications and gender stereotypes are the causes of gender disparities in academic leadership positions in universities. To achieve gender parity strategies like Transparent promotions, gender-responsive policies, Mentoring, reducing gender stereotypes and Leadership trainings will lead to equal representation of male and females in academic leadership positions. According to Social Role Theory, societies traditionally assign males to agentic roles associated with leadership, authority, and decision-making, while females are often assigned communal roles emphasizing caregiving and support. These socially prescribed roles create barriers that limit female's access to leadership opportunities. By different strategies to achieve gender parity, can challenge these traditional role expectations through reducing structural and cultural biases, promote equal opportunities in recruitment and promotion, and create an environment where leadership positions will be accessible to individuals regardless of gender which will lead to equal representation.

Methodology

A mixed research method was used in the study. The study used a convergent mixed research design. According to Creswell (2012), in a convergent the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the problem, analyzes them separately, and then merges and compares the results. The targeted population was university teachers and academic leaders. A sample of 277 was attained, comprising 261 university teachers and 16 academic leaders. Out of 261 university teachers, 119 were from Mbeya, Tanzania, and 142 were from Assam, India, who were selected through incidental convenience sampling. Convenience sampling 'is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling where members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study. It is also referred to the researching subjects of the population that are easily accessible to the researcher'

(Etikan, et al. 2016, p.2). The limitations of convenience sampling according to Emerson (2021) the study results lack generalizability due to the bias of the sample. Out of 16 academic leaders, 8 were from Mbeya, Tanzania, and 8 from Assam, India, who were purposively selected. Purposive sampling ‘is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses (Etikan, et al. 2016, p.2). ’.

Data collection tools involved a questionnaire and interviews. The study used semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with academic leaders in universities of Mbeya and Assam, including deans, directors, and department heads. When interviews provided sufficient information to address the research objective with repetitions observed, no major new themes emerged. Furthermore, open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data from university teachers of Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. According to Creswell (2012), Open-ended responses allow the researcher to identify any comments beyond those provided in closed-ended questions.

Thematic analysis was used for data collected through interviews, in analysis the study followed six phases as indicated in Braun and Clarke (2013) including; *familiarization with data* where the researcher immersed notes taken during interview by reading, actively engage with the material and noting potential ideas. *Coding*, at this phase the researcher worked through the data to identify meaningful features. *Searching for themes*, this stage involved interpretive thinking where the researcher begun grouping codes into broader themes. *Reviewing themes*, at this stage theme were reviewed for coherence; which lead to merging and discarding some themes. *Defining and naming themes*, at this stage the researcher enhanced the essence of each theme and described how it related to the research question, as well as created a clear analytical structure for the final narrative presentation. *Writing up*, at this stage the researcher presented the findings.

Multiple response analysis (for data collected through questionnaires) were used for data analysis. Data collected through the questionnaire were presented using tables and simple percentages. The questionnaire and interview guide have been attached in appendixes I and II.

A pilot study was conducted with 18 university teachers to assess the clarity of the questionnaire, estimate the time required for completion, and identify any structural weaknesses before the main data collection. The pilot study enabled the researcher to identify and revise ambiguous or unclear questions, thereby improving the clarity of the questionnaire. It also established that the maximum time required to complete the questionnaire was approximately 10 minutes.

The study maintained ethical considerations by securing research permits, which allowed the researcher to collect data in Mbeya and Assam. Moreover, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and respondents voluntarily participated in the study.

Demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Demographic data of university teachers of Mbeya, Tanzania and Assam, India

Mbeya, Tanzania				Assam India		
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Age	21 – 30	21	17.6%	21 - 30	43	30.3%

	31 – 40	57	47.9%	31 - 40	64	45.1%
	41 – 50	27	22.7%	41 - 50	22	15.5%
	51 -60	9	7.6%	51 -60	11	7.7%
	61 +	5	4.2%	61 +	2	1.4%
Total		119	100%		142	100%
Gender	Male	78	65.5%	Male	64	45.1%
	Female	41	34.5%	Female	78	54.9%
	Total	119	100%		142	100%
Academic rank	Assistant Lecturers	100	84%	Assistant Professor	116	81.7%
	Lecturers	12	10.1%	Associate Professor	19	13.4
	Senior Lecturers	7	5.9%	Professor	7	4.9
	Associate Professor	0	0			
	Professor	0	0			
	Total	119	100%		142	100%
Experience in Teaching	0 - 5	6	5.0%	0 - 5	7	4.93%
	6 – 10	52	43.7%	6 - 10	42	29.58%
	11 – 15	31	26.1%	11 - 15	56	39.44%
	16 -20	16	13.4%	16 -20	18	12.7%
	21 – 25	9	7.6%	21 - 25	11	7.75%
	26 +	5	4.2%	26 +	8	5.6%
	Total	119	100			100%

Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of university teachers from Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. In terms of age, the majority of university teachers in both Mbeya and Assam were between 31 and 40 years old. Regarding gender, most university teachers in Mbeya were male (65.5%), whereas the majority of teachers in Assam were female (54.9%).

With respect to academic rank, most teachers in Mbeya were Assistant Lecturers (84.0%), while the majority of teachers in Assam were Assistant Professors (81.7%). Concerning teaching experience, the largest proportion of teachers in Mbeya had between 6 and 10 years of teaching experience (43.7%), whereas most teachers in Assam had between 11 and 15 years of teaching experience (39.4%).

Results

Open-ended questionnaire and interview were used for data collection. Data are presented based on both questionnaire and interview.

Data collected through Questionnaire

Open-ended questionnaires were administered to 119 university teachers of Mbeya, Tanzania, and 142 of Assam, India. University teachers were asked to suggest strategies for achieving gender parity in academic leadership positions.

Responses from the Universities of Mbeya, Tanzania

The study comprised 119 university teachers from four universities. Table 4 presents the responses; multiple response analysis was used. Note: The respondents were allowed to suggest more than one strategy for achieving gender equality in academic leadership positions in universities; hence, the total percentages in the table above exceed 100. The percentages were calculated by dividing the number of respondents who suggested a particular strategy (N) by the total number of respondents (119), multiplying by 100.

Table 4

Strategies for Achieving Gender Parity in Academic Leadership in Universities as Suggested by University Teachers of Mbeya, Tanzania

S/N	Strategies	N	Respondents Percentage of Cases
I.	Develop policies that will ensure gender equality in academic leadership positions	48	40.34%
II.	Provision of workshops and seminars that will help increase the confidence of females	45	37.82%
III.	Encouraging, empowering, and motivating females to take leadership	41	34.45%
IV.	Encouraging females in academia to upgrade their education	40	33.61%
V.	Creating awareness in society by eradicating negative cultural norms and beliefs	36	30.25%
VI.	Hiring more female teachers	17	14.29%
VII.	Fairness in academic leadership appointments	13	10.92%
VIII.	Creating equal educational opportunities at all levels	8	6.72%
IX.	Increasing the enrolment of female students in higher learning institutions	7	5.88%

Table 4 shows that the majority of university teachers in Mbeya, Tanzania (40.34%), suggested developing policies to ensure gender parity in academic leadership positions in universities. 37.82% suggested providing workshops and seminars for females, 34.45% suggested encouraging, empowering, and motivating females, 33.61% suggested encouraging females in academia to upgrade their education, and 30.35% suggested creating awareness in society.

Data collected through interviews

Eight (8) interviews were conducted with academic leaders in the roles of dean, department head, and center directors. For confidentiality and anonymity purposes, academic leaders from four universities of Mbeya, Tanzania, were identified as Mbeya University Academic Leaders (MUAL) 1-8. The analysis is presented based on themes.

Hiring more females

During Interviews, the majority of academic leaders, including MUAL 1, MUAL2, MUAL5, MUAL6, and MUAL 8, suggested hiring more female university teachers as a strategy to achieve gender parity in academic leadership positions.

Explaining concerning employing more female teachers, MUAL 6 suggested that “when employing academicians, universities need to consider recruiting more females.”

MUAL 2 suggested retaining the best female students to increase the number of female teachers. The academic leader expressed that:

Every year during graduations, the best female students are announced. We need to retain them; in a few years, we will have many female university teachers

Creating awareness to the society

The majority of academic leaders interviewed including MUAL 1, 3, and 4, suggested creating awareness to the society as a strategy for achieving gender parity in academic leadership positions in universities. The academic leaders mentioned that the Tanzanian society has a negative perception about females; by believing that females are not as good leaders as males. To achieve gender parity, sensitization programs are inevitable; Moreover, MUAL 4 insisted “training and sensitization will help the society know that females are capable as males”.

Developing gender policies

Some academic leaders suggested developing gender policies, including MUAL 4, who expressed that

“There is a need for having policies; for example, if a VC is a female, a deputy is supposed to be a male, and vice versa. Also, in other positions like dean, directors, and head of department, gender should be considered”.

Providing training to females

MUAL 4, 5, and 6 suggested providing training to females as a strategy for achieving gender parity in academic leadership positions. According to academic leaders, training will help females gain knowledge and leadership skills and add more confidence to them. MUAL 6 suggested a need to develop capacity building among females that will help add confidence and courage. Through training, more females will be attracted to take leadership positions

Integration of findings on questionnaire and interview

Based on response from Mbeya, Tanzania, majority of university teachers through questionnaire suggested developing policies to ensure gender parity in academic leadership positions in universities while majority of academic leaders suggested hiring more female university teachers. The findings from the interviews and questionnaires appear to be closely related. Initiating and implementation of gender policies that require a 50:50 representation in leadership positions may begin at the recruitment stage. If more women are hired, more females will progress a greater likelihood into leadership positions over time.

Responses from Universities of Assam, India

The study comprised 142 university teachers from five universities. Table 5 presents the responses; multiple response analysis was used. Note: The respondents were allowed to suggest more than one strategy for achieving gender equality in academic leadership positions in universities; hence, the total percentages in the table above exceed 100. The percentages were calculated by dividing the number of respondents who suggested a particular strategy (N) by the total number of respondents (142), multiplying by 100.

Table 5

Strategies to Achieve Gender Equality in Academic Leadership Positions in Universities (Suggested by University Teachers of Assam)

S/N	Strategies	Respondents	
		N	Percentage of Cases
I.	Initiating and implementing policies for equal representation in academic leadership	52	36.6%
II.	Gender sensitization program to change the negative mentality and perceptions that society has about females and leadership	41	28.9%
III.	Encouraging and motivating females to apply for and accept leadership positions	28	19.7%
IV.	Provision of training, seminars, and workshops on leadership for females	24	16.9%
V.	Reserving leadership positions for females	22	15.5%
VI.	Ensuring merit-based selection	12	8.5%
VII.	Recruiting more female teaching faculty	10	7.0%

Table 5 shows that the majority of university teachers (52 of 142, 36.6%) suggested initiating and implementing policies to achieve gender parity in university academic leadership as a strategy. Moreover, 28.9% suggested provision of gender sensitization programs to change the mentality the society has about females. 19.7% suggested encouraging and motivating females to apply and accept leadership positions.

Data collected through interviews

Eight (8) interviews were conducted with academic leaders in the role of dean, department head, and center directors. For confidentiality and anonymity purposes, academic leaders from four universities of Assam, India and were identified as Assam University Academic Leaders (AUAL) 1 to 8. The analysis is presented based on themes.

Implementing policies to promote gender equality

The majority of academic leaders interviewed suggested implementing policies to promote gender equality. AUAL 2 suggested that

There is a need to have a reservations policy specifically for academic leaders. The policy should state, for example a certain percentage of leadership positions should be for females and a certain percentage for males.

Reservation

However, the AUAL 2 noted that the reservation suggestion would work effectively in public universities, but not in private ones.

Expounding the strategies for achieving gender parity, the AUAL 3 suggested having a reservation strategy policy, the academic leader assessed that:

If the university has 10 leadership positions, five should be given to females and the remaining five to males. It should be mandatory that 50% of positions be given to qualified females.

Recruiting more females

AUAL 5 expressed of having gender policy for leadership positions and recruiting more female university teachers as follows:

Universities must have a gender policy, as do other forms of caste reservations. Also, there is a need for female-only reservations during recruiting. As there are some departments at our university with no or only one female teacher. To have gender balance in leadership, we need more university teachers.

Expressing the need to employ more female academic leaders, AUAL 6 suggested employing more female faculty, specifically in science, engineering, and mathematics departments.

Integration of findings on questionnaire and interview

Based on response from Assam, India, the responses given by teachers (through questionnaire) and by academic leaders (through interviews) both suggested developing and implementing policies to promote gender equality in academic leadership positions.

Discussion

The study found that initiating and implementing gender policies is a key strategy for achieving gender parity in leadership positions in both Mbeya, Tanzania and Assam, India. The strategy was the in both countries due to similarities in the structural barriers females face including negative perceptions, male domination and gender stereotypes despite the countries' different cultural, political, and economic contexts. The finding of the study is consistent with Social Role Theory, developed by Alice Eagly, which argues that gender differences in leadership representation arise largely from socially constructed roles and expectations rather than inherent abilities. According to the theory, societies traditionally assign men to agentic roles associated with leadership, authority, and decision-making, while women are often assigned communal roles emphasizing caregiving and support. These socially prescribed roles create barriers that limit women's access to leadership opportunities. By initiating and implementing gender-responsive policies, universities can challenge these traditional role expectations, reduce structural and cultural biases, promote equal opportunities in recruitment and promotion, and create an environment where leadership positions are accessible to individuals regardless of gender. Therefore, the study's finding supports Social Role Theory by demonstrating that organizational policies can reshape social expectations and institutional practices that have historically contributed to gender inequality in leadership.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the development and effective implementation of policies that promote equal representation are essential for achieving gender parity in academic leadership positions in the universities of Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. Institutional policies that ensure equitable opportunities for leadership participation can help address long-standing gender imbalances and create a more inclusive governance structure. However, the effectiveness of these policies depends on consistent enforcement, institutional commitment, regular monitoring, and accountability mechanisms. Therefore, universities should strengthen gender-responsive policies and integrate them into leadership recruitment, promotion, and decision-making processes to foster sustainable gender equality in academic leadership.

Recommendation

The study recommends that the governments of Tanzania and India make a significant effort to promote gender parity in academic leadership representation including implement gender-balanced hiring committees, transparent promotion criteria, having mentorship programmes that will make more females to leadership positions.

Policy and practical implications

The study found that developing and implementing policies for equal representation is a strategy for achieving gender parity in academic leadership positions in the universities of Mbeya, Tanzania, and Assam, India. This finding suggests that respondents perceive formal institutional policies as the foundation for promoting equitable access to leadership opportunities for females and males. However, policies are most effective when they move beyond broad statements of commitment and are accompanied by clear implementation mechanisms. Universities should establish measurable targets and timelines for increasing females representation in leadership positions, enabling progress to be monitored over time. In addition, institutions should establish gender equality task forces or committees responsible for overseeing policy implementation, advising university management, and addressing barriers to gender equity. Publishing annual gender reports that disclose data on recruitment, promotions, appointments, and leadership representation can further enhance transparency and institutional accountability. Moreover, linking compliance with gender equality policies to institutional performance evaluations, accreditation processes, or access to specific funding opportunities can provide strong incentives for universities to implement these policies effectively rather than treating them as symbolic commitments. Through these measures, gender policies become practical instruments that promote accountability, monitor progress, and facilitate sustainable gender parity in academic leadership across universities in Tanzania and India. This will act as a catalyst for female advancement into leadership positions, not only into lower- and mid-level positions but also into also senior positions. Through policies, the number of females in leadership will increase, leading to better governance, as institutions with gender-diverse leadership are more likely to achieve institutional goals. The success of any policy depends on its implementation and monitoring. This study calls upon university management in both Mbeya and Assam to initiate and implement policies to ensure equal representation in academic leadership positions.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited by involving only nine universities, five from Mbeya and four from Assam. The next study can be expanded by involving more universities. In addition, the study involved one region in Tanzania and one state in India; the next study can expand by involving more regions and states. For respondents, the study was limited to only university teachers and academic leaders in three positions: dean, department head, and director. The next study can expand and involve Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, and Registrars. In terms of data collection tools, the study was limited by using only questionnaires and interviews; the next study can involve more tools, such as focus group discussions. In terms of sample, the study included 277 participants; the next study can expand by involving a larger number of respondents, which will facilitate generalizing the findings. Regarding sampling technique, the use of convenience sampling limits generalizability to all university teachers in the regions.

Another limitation of this study is the potential for social desirability bias. Because data were collected through self-reported responses, participants may have provided answers that reflected socially acceptable views on gender equality and leadership rather than their true beliefs or experiences. Although confidentiality and anonymity were emphasized to encourage honest responses, the possibility of social desirability bias cannot be entirely ruled out and may have influenced the findings.

Areas for future research

The study focused on strategies to achieve gender parity in academic leadership positions in universities. The next study could examine strategies to achieve gender parity in university administrative leadership positions as the current study based on academic leadership only. In addition, future studies can be done on longitudinal studies tracking the impact of gender policies over time. Moreover, further study can be done on comparative studies across public and private universities. In addition, further studies can be conducted to assess the

implementation of gender policies initiated in universities. Moreover, other studies could be conducted to assess how digital platforms promote or hinder gender equality in leadership.

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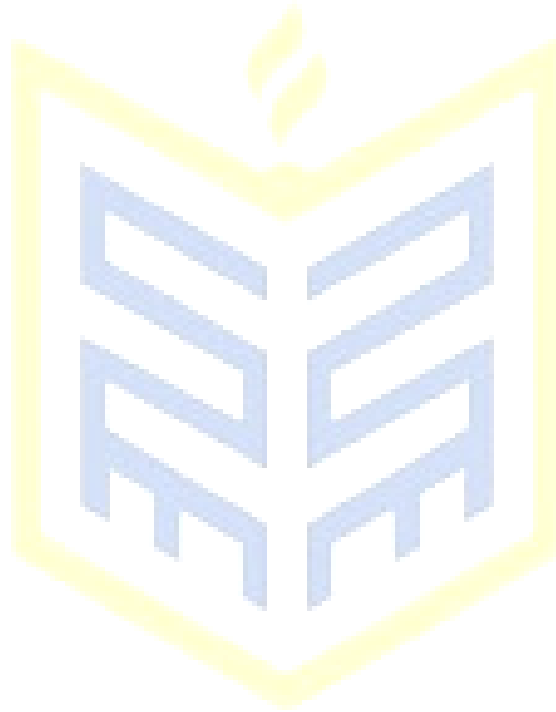
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