

An interaction of patriarchy and female leadership: A synthesis of literature on women leadership in Eswatini

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Abstract

This paper presents results of a systematic research synthesis of 23 studies on female leadership in Eswatini. The review aimed to present conclusions drawn from synthesising findings from studies on women's participation in leadership in Eswatini. Systematic methods were used in the review to identify the 23 research studies focusing on female leadership across sectors in Eswatini. Since the reviewed studies were qualitative, research synthesis methods were used, and three main themes were identified across the excavated studies. The three main themes are: (1) gender inequality, (2) challenges for women leadership, and (3) women empowerment. Sub-themes relating to the main themes also emerged. Challenges highlighted were categorised into two: those inhibiting access to leadership for women, and those affecting women who are already in leadership. Forms of women empowerment discussed in the studies are: in-service training, networking and mentoring. The analysis contributed to knowledge on female leadership in Eswatini by highlighting contributions and limitations of these studies, and further provides a base for future conceptual analysis.

KEYWORDS

Eswatini, female leadership, gender inequality, research synthesis, women empowerment

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Context and implications

Rationale for the study

The main purpose for undertaking the synthesis of literature on women leadership in Eswatini was to add a voice in the leadership discourse using Eswatini's context.

Why the new findings matter

The review on women leadership in Eswatini contributes to the knowledge on African women leadership, and further act as a signpost for future research.

Implications for practioners

The synthesis revealed the dearth of literature on female leadership in Eswatini, thus highlighting the need for scholars and feminist researchers to prioritise documenting the voices of women leaders that remains undocumented, so that upcoming young leaders can learn from the great works done by those who have walked uncharted paths before them.

INTRODUCTION

The leadership discourse is marked by a huge silence on female leadership in Eswatini. Despite women being the majority of the population, political, cultural and social arrangements have routinely excluded women from assuming leadership roles. This has resulted in the under-representation of women in various sectors in the country including the NGO sector. Women's participation in leadership is conspicuous by its absence. Where women have managed to break the glass ceiling of leadership, their narratives remain undocumented. The political, cultural and structural experiences as they relate to Swazi women remain un/under-researched. This therefore renders the conceptualisation of leadership incomplete (Edwards, 2016).

The purpose of systematically reviewing literature on women in leadership in Eswatini was to respond to the call for more representation of women voices in the leadership discourse (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). Hallinger (2018) recommends both national and cross-national reviews of African research on the role of women in leadership. This review makes a significant contribution to the knowledge on African women leadership since it acts as a signpost to guide future research. It highlights what has been found by researchers to date and identifies what research still needs to be done (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). As in many African contexts, women in leadership in Eswatini have had to overcome institutional barriers to attaining leadership positions and socio-cultural norms that question their legitimacy as they seek to lead change in ways that depart from patriarchal norms, in a society that is strongly entrenched in cultural beliefs that are oppressive to women as they manoeuvre in leadership. Thus, while women leadership in Eswatini shares some similarities with other global contexts, there are also features of this context that justify a research synthesis, mainly being to expose what has been documented on women leadership in Eswatini.

In an attempt to map the volume of literature on women in leadership in Eswatini, the study employed a research synthesis to make sense of the body of literature available (Hallinger, 2013). Systematic methods were used to identify relevant studies, extract information and synthesise common findings. The synthesised literature formed a strong base for analysing findings for this study on female leadership in Eswatini, and also helped to

identify gaps for further research. Due to the scarcity of scholarly research on women leadership, the review identified empirical studies and research on women across sectors that: provide a historical perspective of female leaders in Eswatini; are a representation of female leaders in all sectors in Eswatini, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business, political, and educational settings; examine barriers encountered by female leaders in Eswatini; and study the relevant leadership empowerment for women.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN ESWATINI

The review focuses on Eswatini, a small landlocked country between Mozambique and South Africa. The country is Africa's only remaining absolute monarchy. It is an ethnically homogeneous country with the people sharing a common language and known for preserving their conventional way of life, founded on Christianity and patriarchy (Motsa, 2018). With a population of just over a million (1,093,238) people, a majority of the country's population are women at 562,127 (Central Statistics Office [CSO], 2017). Generally, girls are born in larger numbers than boys—only 89 boys are born to every 100 girls born. Girls are known to have a longer lifespan than boys and men. However, this norm is slowly changing in the Eswatini context due to the devastating impact of HIV and AIDS on the population, which has seen a more significant drop in life expectancy at birth among girls than boys. Life expectancy at birth among females is 51.5 years compared to 52.7 years among males over the same period (CSO, 2017). The difference in life expectancy is largely caused by the HIV and AIDS induced mortality or death which affects girls and women more than it affects boys and men. Even with such dynamics occurring in the population, females continue to outnumber males in the country's population.

Furthermore, 63% of the population live below the poverty line in Eswatini. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2013) report shows that 72% of households headed by women tend to suffer more poverty than 67% headed by men partly because of economic inequalities. When women are poor, the living standards and quality of life of the people dependent on them also suffer. The Swazi society is patriarchal in nature and as such the socialisation of children is heavily influenced by this. Dlamini (2022) asserts that for Swazi women, good self-esteem and faith in themselves does not come naturally since they are taught at a young age that a woman's value depends on her being attached to a man. The patriarchal setting and related stereotypes often fuels behaviour that oppresses women, tending to promote the notion of male superiority and female subordination. These norms likely contribute to women's continued under-representation in leadership.

METHOD

To identify relevant studies and literature that pertains to women leadership in Eswatini and extract information that can be synthesised, systematic methods were used. The scarcity of literature specific to women leadership in Eswatini compelled that an unbounded search strategy be employed to access possibly all the literature available regardless of the date of publication (Hallinger, 2013).

Identification of sources

Literature was accessed through various databases including Google Scholar, the UNESWA Research Gate, UJoogle, and Google. Walk-ins in local libraries and the main University of

Eswatini Library Research Services were done. All databases were explored using the following key terms: female leadership, women leadership, gender, leadership practices, leadership. The eligibility criteria were: peer-reviewed journal articles, conference presentation papers and book chapters written in the English language, available full text, published and unpublished theses related to women's leadership in Eswatini. A clearly defined criterion for selecting the literature minimises bias (Moyo et al., 2020). Although due diligence was done to ensure a comprehensive search, it is possible that some research may have been overlooked.

The relevant studies were downloaded and saved together with their reference lists. To further expand the search for possible sources, the reference lists of all the accessed publications were also examined to identify other potentially relevant studies. In total 28 studies were identified and reviewed including a thesis accessed through the manual search in one of the local libraries. Sources that were not related to women leadership in Eswatini were excluded. There were 23 relevant documents comprised of 13 peer-reviewed journal articles, 2 book chapters, 3 published conference papers, 4 published theses, and 1 unpublished thesis. All the accessed documents were dated between 1991 and 2022.

A Microsoft (MS) Excel spreadsheet was used to sort and store the excavated literature. It included elements that will enhance analysis of the data. The data were classified according to the author's name, the year of publication, the title of document, type (conceptual, empirical or a review), the research method used, the research design, the aim of the study and major findings. This allowed for a structured synthesis of data (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). Through the use of inductive analysis, the aims of all the accessed studies were analysed and sorted into themes.

Data analysis

Since the extracted studies were mostly qualitative, qualitative research synthesis was employed to identify and analyse themes reported in the studies. Moyo and Perumal (2020) suggest the use of a two-step analysis to synthesise the findings from excavated literature. The first step entailed identifying the findings from individual studies and storing them in a brief format in an MS Excel file and in a longer format in an MS Word file. Findings drawn from each study in the Excel file were examined, classified into categories according to the fields from which they were drawn, and broad themes were generated in an iterative process. Through this process seven categories of the studies were established, and three broad themes were identified from the 23 studies on female leadership across sectors in Eswatini. The inductively derived themes were coded to allow a cross-study synthesis. In the second step the same process was followed to identify four subthemes from the main themes. An elaborate discussion on the categories, themes and subthemes was carried out on a separate Word document.

RESULTS

As highlighted above, the analysed data yielded seven categories representative of a variety of sectors from which the literature was drawn. This is a result of the widened search on women leadership in Eswatini that opened the scope of literature to surface all the available studies. This was done to allow a meaningful synthesis. The seven categories that emerged from the qualitative synthesis of the 23 studies are: women in business—three studies (Bimha et al., 2018; Joubert, 2011; Joubert & Kinnusi, 1992); women and culture—four studies (Dlamini & Migiro, 2014; Joubert & Nkambule, 1996; Mdluli, 2013; Thwala, 2010); women and education—three studies (Makhubu, 1998; Nkambule, 2017; Nyathi, 2021; Nyawo & Nsibandwe, 2014); women and religion—four studies (Cazziol, 1992; Kaunda, 2014; Nyawo, 2020; Zigira, 2000); women in NGOs—two studies (Mofolo, 2011; Zigira, 1998); women

in politics—three studies (Dlamini, 2022; Ouellet, 2012; Simelane, 2011; Tsododo, 2014); and women in public enterprises—two studies (Kamalizeni et al., 2018, 2021).

Out of the 23 studies, 20 were found to be qualitative, two used the mixed method approach and one was quantitative. Furthermore, the distribution of authors is not very wide across sectors as some co-authored more than one literature in a particular field. For instance, Joubert is recurring in three publications, a single author of an article classified under women and culture, and co-authored two works in the women and business category. Nyawo appears twice, with one article on women and educational leadership and one article on women leadership and religion. Zigira has two studies, one on women and religion, while the other is on women and NGOs. Kamalizeni co-authored two articles on women leadership in public enterprises. This shows a trend of limited scholarship on women leadership in the various sectors.

Although the search covered a wide spectrum of fields such as education, religion, business, and politics, and public enterprises, there are categories where there was no literature found on women leadership, such as science, technology and engineering fields. The reason for this could be that women are a minority in leadership in these fields so scholars tend to focus on fields where women have managed to break the glass ceiling and are slowly taking up leadership positions (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009).

From these studies three major themes emerged, namely: gender inequality; challenges for women leadership; women empowerment. A summary of the findings from the 23 studies analysed is presented in [Table 1](#).

Themes and sub-themes

Within the major themes, sub-themes also emerged. While there were no sub-themes on the first theme of gender inequality, the second theme on challenges for women leadership was further sub-classified into barriers to access, and challenges for women have attained leadership. The third theme of women empowerment yielded two sub-themes: in-service training and networks. [Table 2](#) summarises the synthesised themes.

Gender inequality

In exploring the findings of the study it emerged that one of the themes recurring in most studies was that women's inclusion and gender inequality in leadership continue to be a major challenge (Bimha et al., 2018; Carziolla, 1992; Joubert & Kinnusi, 1992; Nyathi, 2021; Nyawo & Nsibande, 2014; Thwala, 2010; Tsododo, 2014; Zigira, 1998, 2000), which shows that, although there are more women in Eswatini than men, their voices and power are far less than those of men. They continue to inhabit a subordinate segment of society. Their representation in many sectors of society is still unequal, with most women occupying at most middle management or low-status professions, without decision-making power. In essence, organisations' leadership is still dominated by men. For instance, Zigira (2000) conducted a study on four women organisations. Findings showed that despite these organisations' efforts to promote gender awareness and social advocacy either in a womanist approach that accepts women's positioning in Swazi culture or in the liberal feminist tradition that espouses women's individual rights, the women's movement failed to reach the critical mass level to enable women to influence public policy and come to terms with the deconstruction of the dominant gender ideology.

Similarly, Nyawo and Nsibande (2014) conducted a study with 21 female school leaders to ascertain the extent to which socio-cultural factors impact on gender equality in

TABLE 1 Classification of studies based on themes.

No.	Author	Gender inequality	Challenges to women leadership	Women empowerment
1	Bimha et al. (2018)	x	x	x
2	Cazziol (1992)	x	x	
3	Dlamini and Migiro (2014)	x	x	
4	Dlamini (2022)	x	x	
5	Joubert (2011)		x	x
6	Joubert and Kinnusi (1992)	x	x	
7	Joubert and Nkambule (1996)	x	x	
8	Kaunda (2014)	x	x	
9	Kamalizeni et al. (2021)	x	x	x
10	Kamalizeni et al. (2018)	x		
11	Makhubu (1998)	x		
12	Mdluli (2013)	x		
13	Mofolo (2011)	x	x	
x14	Nkambule (2017)	x	x	
15	Nyathi (2021)	x		
16	Nyawo (2020)	x	x	x
17	Nyawo and Nsibandwe (2014)	x	x	x
18	Ouellet (2012)	x	x	
19	Simelane (2011)		x	
20	Thwala (2010)	x	x	
x21	Tsododo (2014)	x	x	x
22	Zigira (2000)	x	x	
23	Zigira (1998)	x	x	

TABLE 2 Themes and sub-themes.

Main themes	Sub-themes
Gender inequality	
Challenges for women leadership	Barriers to access Challenges for women in leadership
Women empowerment	In-service training Networks

accessing leadership positions at schools in Eswatini. Findings from the study showed that long-standing patriarchal heritage persists and continues to define gender relationships in all subsystems in Eswatini. A similar occurrence was also reported by Bimha et al. (2018), who conducted a survey with 50 female entrepreneurs across the country. Findings from this study showed that despite the efforts of governmental organisations and state-owned enterprises to promote women entrepreneurship in Eswatini, women entrepreneurs are still under-represented in national economic activities. They are marginalised and not adequately supported for various reasons, including the lack of interest and commitment demonstrated by the women themselves.

An unpublished thesis by Nkambule (2017) on female high school head teachers in Eswatini revealed a huge disparity in the number of female leaders as compared to their male counterparts in various levels in the education system. A review showed that the population of all teachers for primary, secondary and high school level is 7462 and of these, 72% (5365) are women and only 28% (2097) are men, reflecting an overwhelming domination of women over men in this profession. Logically, one would expect the composition of leadership to be also dominated by women. However, this is not the case as female leadership in most levels of the education sector is dominated by males. For instance, in higher education women are seen to be advancing to leadership positions, however they remain under-represented. Out of 35 administrators at various levels (deans, heads of departments and senior lecturers) from four of the country's institutions of higher learning, only 13 were women and 22 were male.

At high school level female leadership was at 28%. Out of the 254 head teachers, there were only 70 female head teachers. At primary school level there were 585 head teachers and 245 were female while 340 were male. Similarly, Nyathi's (2021) study on how women who are in educational leadership are perceived showed that female teachers were not afforded equal opportunities to employment and promotion in comparison with their male counterparts.

In politics, the studies by Tsododo (2014), Ouellet (2012) and Simelane (2011) highlighted the gross gender under-representation of women. Tsododo (2014) asserts that Eswatini is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament with two chambers: a House of Assembly and a House of Senate. The house of assembly has 65 members; 55 elected by universal suffrage directly from constituencies and 10 appointed by the king for a term of up to 5 years. The senate is composed of 30 members, of whom 10 are elected by the house of assembly and 20 are appointed by the king. In terms of gender equality in the participation and representation of women in politics there are still serious challenges despite the recent enactment of the Election of Women into the House of Assembly Act No. 9 of 2018. The Act was enacted as a measure to help deal with the lack of fulfilment of the constitutional quota of women in Parliament.

The country's civil society also conducted a 'Vote for a Woman' campaign, which included conducting awareness-raising activities at community level and among women's groups as well as some capacity building of aspiring women candidates prior to voter registration. A very high registration of women voters was reported. Despite all the positive rhetoric, the country has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) of 0.557, ranked 150th out of 188 countries in the world, and is considered to have low human development. Furthermore, Thwala (2010) highlights that although the Eswatini constitution (2005) contains equality and human rights clauses—that should provide an environment conducive to the promotion of gender equality as it gives powers to individuals, even women, to stand for elections—in the country's 2018 elections, out of 331 candidates for Members of Parliament only 14% were women and 86% were men. Of these, only two women were elected to Parliament while the others represented at the local government levels. Kamalizeni et al. (2021) note that when women are a minority, democratising leadership becomes excessively problematic.

With regards to leadership in the government sector, there is scarcity of empirical studies on women leadership, therefore the analysis is based on one survey conducted by UNFPA (2013). For purposes of this study the scope has been narrowed down to the positions of principal secretaries and heads of government departments. The function of principal secretaries is to operate as technical leaders of ministries and can actually shape the overall functioning of the ministries for which they are in charge. The sex distribution of principal secretaries is also heavily skewed towards men. For instance, in 2013 women principal secretaries made up only 14% as there were only 3 female principal secretaries out of 21 (UNFPA, 2013). The survey also revealed dominance of male leadership among

government departments as they constituted 73%, while women were only 23%. In general, the proportion of women leaders in government does not exceed 30%.

Challenges for female leadership

A majority of the publications addressed a variety of challenges faced by female leaders in various contexts of organisational leadership. The nature of challenges was further sub-classified into: barriers inhibiting women to access leadership, and challenges faced by women once they assume leadership.

Barriers inhibiting women to access leadership

Studies across the listed categories revealed a number of challenges that inhibit women in the trajectory to access leadership. Nyawo (2020), Kamalizeni et al. (2018), Bihma et al. (2018) and Dlamini and Migiro (2014) outline patriarchy and socialisation as major contributors to women's lack of aspirations towards assuming leadership. Kamalizeni et al. (2018) conducted a study on the leadership of public enterprises in Eswatini. The findings revealed that leadership positions in the public enterprise in Eswatini were overwhelmingly occupied by male managers. One major reason cited by the female participants when asked about women's lack of interest in taking up leadership position, was the cultural-historical and religious stereotype perspective.

Similarly, Bihma et al.'s (2018) study findings showed that women were not taking up entrepreneurship because they lacked self-confidence due to negative stereotypes that women are not capable of running businesses on their own without help from men. Interestingly, a case study conducted by Nyawo (2020) on a women's prayer group led by a woman showed that patriarchy inhibits women to even stand up for themselves in the wake of oppression even by other women who hold leadership positions. Nyawo notes that patriarchy emphasises a hierarchical order and makes people believe that someone has to be in charge in any given situation, and that a person's authority demands unquestioning obedience. As a result, participants of the study were subservient to leadership; through her position and authority, the female leader commands a great deal of respect from followers, who would not challenge her on anything, lest they offend God.

Other challenges against women's advancement towards leadership cited by Nyawo and Nsibande (2014), Tsododo (2014), Mdluli (2013) and Simelane (2011) are gendered attitudes and perceptions birthed by the socio-cultural landscape, which does not favour aspiring women leaders. Zigira (2000) labels social enculturation, which shapes women's thought patterns related to social norms and values, as a bigger barrier than stereotypes or any other external barriers that prohibit women from assuming leadership positions. These are self-perceptions of women bred and perpetuated by social agents like family to ensure their continuity down the generations.

Two different studies (Nkambule, 2017; Nyawo & Nsibande, 2014) showed that over and above patriarchy and self-perception by women, gender poses as a challenge for women in rural areas where stereotyping is still rife. Nkambule (2017) revealed that female principals who were participants of the study, reported to be met with hostility in their respective schools. Both male and female teachers seem to be unreceptive to female leadership. With regards to internal barriers to 'climbing the ladder', studies showed that women were deterred by the lack of support from fellow women in leadership positions. For instance, Kamalizeni et al. (2018) revealed the existence of cynicism among women caused by widespread jealousy from women leaders creating barriers to those women at the grassroots levels still aspiring towards leadership. Similar findings are reported by Nyawo and Nsibande (2014). Bimha et al. (2018) and Joubert (2011) bring in a new perspective on the barriers to women

taking up leadership in business and entrepreneurship, stating that socio-economic factors, such as the lack of financial support and negotiation skills, inhibit women from advancing towards running small and medium-scale businesses. Mofolo's (2011) study on women in NGOs also cites the lack of funding as a disempowering factor on women's advancement.

Challenges for women in leadership positions

A number of studies revealed that women who are in leadership positions are constantly faced with various challenges while trying to execute their roles (Dlamini, 2022; Kamalizeni et al., 2018; Nyawo, 2020; Simelane, 2011; Tsododo, 2014). Family and work commitment conflict, gender bias and discrimination, lack of role models, and lack of networks are highlighted as some of the inhibitors for female leaders from taking a leap from being just good to being great leaders. Women leaders are likely to be working a double shift, particularly when they have children (Tsododo, 2014). In a study conducted by Nkambule (2017) women head teachers reported that they were further burdened by their very active role in child care as mothers, unlike their male counterparts who usually have partners who take major responsibility for home and family duties. Due to the demands of the roles of mother and ideal leader, women usually find their priorities conflicted, resulting to stress (Nyawo & Nsibande, 2014).

Several authors conclude that the root cause of all these challenges is that Eswatini remains predominantly a patriarchal society in which cultural norms and religious institutions significantly influence the moulding of gender identities (Dlamini, 2022; Kamalizeni et al., 2018; Nyawo, 2020; Thwala, 2010; Tsododo, 2014; Zigira, 2000). These are the norms that promote the notion of male superiority and female subordination, and give rise to different expectations for male and female behaviour, thus contributing to women's continued under-representation in leadership roles across sectors. For instance, Dlamini (2022) depicts a vivid picture of the effects of patriarchy by documenting the odyssey of one woman who was a traditional ruler and the senate in Eswatini for close to three decades. Her career was marked by continuous struggles against persistent patriarchal attitudes, gender stereotypes and stigmatisation.

Women leadership empowerment

From the reviewed studies women empowerment emerged as the key aspect towards addressing issues of gender inequality and enhancing women's leadership; Kaunda (2014), Mofolo (2011), Simelane (2011) and Joubert (2011) propose various strategies suited to empower female leaders across sectors. Kaunda (2014) highlights the need for developing a comprehensive vision of gender justice within the Swati context through creating an understanding of the Swati culture in relation to the unity of humanity, and work towards creating society where an intricate balance between female and male can be maintained. Kaunda argues that there are positive ways of expressing culture that are not ideological and subjugating, but enrich interconnectedness and equality of humanity such as developing profound awareness on gender-sensitive attitude and lifestyle throughout the society. Similarly, Nkambule (2017) asserts that targeting of male attitudes is necessary to change their mind set by having programmes that can be implemented to facilitate such changes, preferably from an early age. Furthermore, women too need to adopt certain changes themselves, such as working harder to increase visibility, improving one's time management to be able to find the balance between family and work commitments, and deliberately searching for and exploiting opportunities.

Kamalizeni et al. (2018) suggest ongoing in-service training for women in leadership positions, stating that there should be gender inclusive training to empower women to be prepared to deal with all the challenges. Bihma et al. (2018) suggest mentoring as a viable

strategy for empowering women. Nkambule (2017) notes the main benefit of mentoring from the mentor and mentee perspective stating that such relationships could provide opportunities of aspiring leaders to gain first-hand experiences from their experienced leaders of the challenges, benefits of the role, and skills required to become successful leaders. Lastly, networking was also identified by some studies as a viable strategy. Nyawo (2020) and Nyawo and Nsibande (2014) assert that through networking, new knowledge is shared by both the new and experienced leaders.

Limitations

This paper offered a critical examination of the current state of knowledge on Swati women in leadership and management. It draws from an extensive review of existing published research on women of Eswatini to come up with a summary of what has been studied and is currently known about gender inequality, barriers to access leadership, and challenges for women in the leadership position. It also explored empowerment strategies for women. Based on this review there are major gaps in the depth of literature produced on women in leadership across sectors, making it difficult to come up with plausible conclusions on women in Eswatini. Other Southern African countries, such as South Africa, have seen an increase in the number of sector-specific literature on women leadership. For instance, scholars have produced a significant amount of studies on the topic of women in educational leadership in the South African context alone (Edwards, 2016; Edwards & Perumal, 2017; Lumby, 2013; Morojele et al., 2013).

Furthermore, a majority of the analysed studies were qualitative, framed by Western feminist theories, with only one study (Nyawo, 2020) drawing reflections from African women's anthropology, an approach that considers culture as an indispensable variable in gender discourse in Africa. Similarly, Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) noted that a majority of developing scholarship on African women leaders relied on Western theoretical frameworks and discourses with very little reference to African understanding of world views of gender anchored in Africa, and therefore suggested the development of more research that will be devoted to building theory for the African context. Moyo and Perumal (2020) attest to the appropriateness of African feminism in the framing of African women studies by stating that African feminism insists on understanding the historical roles that were played by men and women in traditional African societies to better understand modern gender relations.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Gender inequality

Gender inequality is one major theme that was addressed by most of the reviewed studies. Although gender inequality is a general concern common in many African countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Lesotho, representation seems to be country specific. For instance, countries such as South Africa and Botswana have a relatively high number of women in leadership and managerial positions (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). This calls for a context-specific approach in the analysis of women's experiences based on their unique cultural, historical and economic circumstances. This view finds support in Moyo and Perumal's (2020) assertion that there is a need to dissect the interrelated contextual features that influence the comparison of female and male leadership. The disproportion of women in Eswatini makes it necessary that women in leadership are empowered so that they become well rounded and competent. This in itself can encourage other aspiring

women leaders to take up leadership positions. If women are not considered to be born with leadership qualities, it means they must be empowered to attain them. Then they will inspire and mentor one another to demonstrate qualities of being visionary leaders.

With all the policies in support of gender equality in the country, but still a glaring disparity in men and women in leadership, a follow-up on the implementation of these policies and programmes intended to create women's inclusion is necessary. Most gender policies have been developed to articulate broad plans on aspects of gender parity and thus fail to provide focused attention to the specific issues on women leadership in the workplace. Kamalizeni et al. (2018) contend that gender policy reforms should seek to inject several resources to allow practical implementation of plans that recognise involvement of the marginalised.

Challenges

The analysed studies also highlighted cultural, historical and religious stereotypes, patriarchy, and lack of support among women as barriers to access women leadership in Eswatini. Similar findings are highlighted by other African scholars (Naidoo et al., 2016; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). It is important to note that stereotypes and prejudices against women are shared by groups considered more powerful in society and at times further supported by religious doctrines, as revealed by Nyawo (2020) study. These values become so deeply rooted and therefore anchored, creating major barriers to females aspiring to become leaders (Kamalizeni et al., 2018). Therefore, there is need to transform the deep-rooted, stereotyped attitudes and oppressive structures and situations that continue to hinder progress of women in Africa.

A positive narrative on barriers to women's access to leadership is advanced by Hill et al. (2016) who assert that while all the barriers prevail, increased recognition of women leadership is slowly surfacing, as more women are becoming conscious of their involvement in the workplace and challenge the status quo. Additionally, the findings established challenges faced by women as they execute their leadership roles, including family and work commitment conflict, gender bias and discrimination, and the absence of women networks. Naidoo et al. (2016) reported similar challenges for female head teachers of South African schools. Kamalizeni et al. (2018) note that when women are heavily burdened with family demands the leadership aspect is often neglected, with focus on managerial functions only. This seems to perpetuate the stereotype perceptions that women are not effective as leaders. On the contrary, Bahiru and Mengistu (2018) consider women's ability to balance between work and family a demonstration of their outstanding capabilities and skills, which appear to be under-utilised in many organisations. This assertion implies that women are able to compete equally and as effectively as their male counterparts in leadership roles. However, Kamalizeni et al. (2018) caution that involvement in numerous roles may lead to role ambiguity, and if not well managed may likely trigger role conflict for leaders.

Women leadership empowerment

Women leadership empowerment is the third and last theme that emerged from the findings. The studies highlighted a number of strategies for women empowerment including ongoing in-service trainings, networking and mentoring. The findings showed that women take up leadership without any form of preparation for the new position. This brings about many challenges as they navigate their new path. To address this gap, governments should set up initiatives that seek to equip women with leadership skills (Kamalizeni et al., 2021). Leadership skills are likely to be acquired expeditiously through training in workshops, and

this approach tends to be more ideal for working prospective women leaders as opposed to the formal convention of university long-term programmes (Ebrahimi et al., 2017).

Mentoring was revealed as a useful strategy in developing women leadership as mentors demonstrate leadership qualities for would-be women leaders. White et al. (2018) assert that mentors who work closely with their mentees transfer their knowledge, attitude and skills, and model appropriate leadership behaviours that are likely to improve organisational effectiveness. Kamalizeni et al. (2018) established that aspiring leaders benefit a lot from being exposed to managers in top leadership positions. The mentor provides psychological support in the career growth of the mentee. White et al. (2018) assert that effective mentoring tends to be unstructured, and employ a variety of techniques and some degree of creativity.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The implications of this review are far-reaching, considering the published work on women leadership across sectors in Eswatini. It is clear that women leadership is an area that is significantly under-theorised and under-researched. Thus this research has deep implications for gender and feminist researchers. It is imperative that scholars prioritise documenting the voices of women because there is a lot of work undertaken by women leaders in different capacities that remains undocumented, robbing young women who are upcoming leaders of role models and examples of women who have paved the way in various leadership positions across sectors. The reviewed work shows that with empowerment women can rise above the many barriers and successfully lead organisations.

This review has particular implication for the education and NGOs sector. There is need to collaborate in various ways to ensure that the non-formal education aspect is also incorporated into the country's education system to empower minority and vulnerable groups such as the disabled and women to better deal with their challenges. It is about time that non-formal education programmes are considered an essential component in the education system for they have the potential to help women overcome their challenges. Lastly, women leadership literature is very scarce, with no research focused on women representation in the science and engineering sector, thus it is imperative to have research that will focus on women leadership in all sectors to render the conceptualisation and discourse on leadership complete.

CONCLUSION

The intention of the literature synthesis was to explore studies on women leadership to surface the volume and type of literature available on women leader in Eswatini. By conducting a literature synthesis of the excavated studies the study revealed that literature on women in leadership is scanty across sectors; therefore, more scholarly work around women leadership is needed to showcase the potential of women in leadership and spur new ways of theorising. This will help bring about insights about leadership that were previously clouded by a male-biased perspective. The study highlighted themes covered in these studies that were all relating to women and their challenges that are a result of the historical, cultural and social context of the Swati society. It is by no means intended to essentialise women leadership, but to provide valuable insights into what has been done and what still needs to be done on the topic of women leadership in the country.

What is evident through the synthesis is that gender inequality, stereotypes and discrimination associated with the patriarchal context and socialisation of women and men

from their childhood stages are the key contributors to women's low representation. These also emerged as major barriers to women's advancement and effective leadership in Eswatini.

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