Gender Perspectives on Academic Leadership in African Universities

Roseanne Diab, Phyllis Kalele, Muthise Bulani, Fred K. Boateng, and Madeleine Mukeshimana

Abstract

Women are under-represented in higher education leadership across the globe, with the gender gap in Africa being even more pronounced. This article reports gender-disaggregated statistics for senior academic leadership at 16 African research-intensive universities. The gender gap at the level of Vice-Chancellor (VC), the executive head of the university, is striking and is replicated at each leadership level. Women represented only 13% of VCs, half the universities had fewer than 50% women in their executive teams and half had fewer than 30% female Deans. The article also presents the results of an online survey instrument that was administered to faculty members at Deans' level and above at six of the institutions spread across South Africa, Ghana, and Rwanda to gain insights into women's academic leadership. Women ranked competence and experience as the most important factors in their leadership accession, indicative of belief in their own abilities and self-worth. They expressed a need for mentoring, measures to address discrimination and greater visibility. A wide gap was evident in men's and women's understanding of obstacles to more women occupying leadership positions. Men placed responsibility for the gender gap on women, stating that few are suitably qualified, and that women do not aspire to senior leadership positions. For their part, women pointed to systemic institutional failures as responsible for their under-representation.

Key words: gender; gender gap; Africa; higher education; women's leadership

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Sommaire

Les femmes sont sous-représentées dans les postes de direction de l'enseignement supérieur partout dans le monde, et l'écart entre les sexes est encore plus prononcé en Afrique. Cet article présente des statistiques ventilées par sexe concernant les hauts responsables académiques de 16 universités africaines à forte intensité de recherche. L'écart entre les sexes au niveau du vice-chancelier (VC), le chef exécutif de l'université, est frappant et se reproduit à chaque niveau de direction. Les femmes ne représentent que 13 % des vice-chanceliers, la moitié des universités comptent moins de 50 % de femmes dans leur équipe de direction et la moitié comptent moins de 30 % de doyennes. L'article présente également les résultats d'une enquête en ligne menée auprès de membres du corps enseignant de niveau doyen ou supérieur dans six établissements répartis entre l'Afrique du Sud, le Ghana et le Rwanda, afin d'obtenir des informations sur le leadership universitaire des femmes. Les femmes ont classé la compétence et l'expérience comme les facteurs les plus importants dans leur accession au leadership, ce qui indique qu'elles croient en leurs propres capacités et en leur valeur personnelle. Elles ont exprimé un besoin de mentorat, de mesures pour lutter contre la discrimination et d'une plus grande visibilité. Un large fossé est apparu entre les hommes et les femmes dans leur compréhension des obstacles à l'accession d'un plus grand nombre de femmes à des postes de direction. Les hommes attribuent la responsabilité de l'écart entre les sexes aux femmes, déclarant que peu d'entre elles sont suffisamment qualifiées et que les femmes n'aspirent pas à occuper des postes de direction. Pour leur part, les femmes ont pointé du doigt les défaillances institutionnelles systémiques comme responsables de leur sous-représentation.

Mots clés: genre, inégalités entre les sexes, Afrique, enseignement supérieur, leadership des femmes

Introduction

Women are under-represented in senior leadership positions in higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe. Only 24% of the top 200 universities in the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings have a female leader (THE, 2023). Given that the

world average for women faculty representation in tertiary education institutions increased from 33.6% in 1990 to 43.2% in 2020 (THE and UNESCO, 2022), the gender gap in leadership is striking.

While the percentages differ regionally and also depend on the sample of universities included, the general pattern of under-representation of women in senior leadership is upheld. For example, Jarboe (2018) reported that women comprised 29% of Vice-Chancellors (VCs) in the United Kingdom (2018 statistics), having increased from 17% in 2013 and 22% in 2016. In the European Union, 24% (2019 statistics) of all heads of HEIs were women (EC, 2021). Notably, 22 countries had no female university leaders (https://sciencebusiness.net/network-news/eua-hard-numbers-female-university-leaders-europe, accessed 24 August 2023). According to the American College President Study, in 2016, 30% of all college presidents in the United States were women (https://www.aceacps.org/women-presidents/accessed 24 August 2023).

The gender gap in leadership in Africa is even more pronounced. Of the 1 400 universities on the continent, only 41 had female VCs (2018 statistics) (https://fawovc.org/accessed 24 August 2023). At 2.9%, this is substantially lower than elsewhere in the world. The Forum for African Women Vice-Chancellors (FAWoVC) headquartered at Makerere University in Uganda was launched in 2016 to address this leadership gap across Africa. Its activities have included building Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) leadership, developing management capacity among African women VCs and emerging female academics in Mozambique, Sudan and Uganda, and gender-based assessments of the STI ecosystems in these countries. Statistics for selected African countries confirm women leaders' under-representation. For example, in 2021, only six of the 26 VCs (23%) in South Africa were women (IOL, 2021), while a mere two of the 12 vice-president positions (17%) at three Ethiopian public universities were occupied by women (2016 statistics) (Semela et al., 2017). Idahosa's (2019) review paper provides a useful context to the under-representation of women in university leadership across Africa, identifying changes required to close the gender gap.

Gender Dimension of Academic Leadership

Under-representation of women in academic leadership is a challenge from both a social justice perspective as well as in terms of the failure to utilise a population's full capacity. Furthermore, many studies have pointed to improved organisational performance in the presence of leadership diversity, which includes gender (Longman, 2018). It has also been reported that women in academic leadership positions provide role models that can improve female student retention (Kagoda, 2011), which is especially important in countries where girls have low education attainment.

When it comes to reasons for the gender gap in academic leadership, the barriers faced by women are complex and well-documented. The fact that they are mainly positioned in the lower academic ranks means that only a small pool of women is available in senior ranks to take up leadership positions (Shreffler et al., 2019).

Some studies cite individual factors such as a lack of self-confidence (imposter syndrome), a lack of ambition (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016), or women's reluctance to apply for senior management roles. For example, Ward and Eddy (2013) argue that women often forego senior leadership positions because of sexist cultures in institutions, messy politics, or challenges with work-family balance. Others (e.g., Gash et al., 2012) support the notion that this is a woman's choice, noting that they often prefer part-time and potentially flexible work.

Universities' gendered institutional culture tends to be biased towards male academics (Ceci et al., 2014), with women academics being constrained by social sanctions that range from hostility to outright rejection (Domenico and Jones, 2006; Parks-Stamm et al., 2008; Prentice and Carranza, 2012). Universities increasingly operate in a neoliberal, globalised and corporatised context that emphasises measurable outputs and revenue generation (McKay and Monk, 2017) and normalises a culture of overworking, self-promotion, individualism, deficient collegiality, and competitiveness (Sutherland, 2017; Maddrell et al., 2019).

This gendered culture poses a challenge to women with family responsibilities, as they are less able than their male colleagues to work outside of office hours (Emslie and Hunt, 2009). Moreover, it means that women are less able to attend to family responsibilities in the course of their working day, or take career breaks when they need to without being penalised (Mukhwana et al., 2020). In instances where universities have policies that allow for flexible working arrangements to

enable academics to attend to family responsibilities, women academics who utilise them do so to the detriment of their career. They experience 'flexibility stigma', as they are perceived by colleagues as not contributing their fair share of work, and as reluctant to work overtime in a culture that praises overworking (Padavic et al., 2020).

The responsibility of caring for children and other family members affects women and men disproportionately. In general, women still carry a far greater caring burden and are often identified with this responsibility (Morley and Crossouard, 2015; Boateng, 2018), which causes them to experience work-family role conflict to a far greater extent than men (Torp et al., 2018). This particularly impacts women in the early stages of their careers. It is exacerbated among women in science and technology because experimental tasks may require working in the evenings and over weekends.

A further barrier is linked to the well-known observation that women's research output is generally lower than that of men (Cardel et al., 2020), negatively impacting their chances of promotion and career progression. As long as the number of publications is used as a metric for promotion or suitability for an academic leadership position, women will continue to be disadvantaged.

Based on the foregoing, an often-cited solution to improve the gender balance in senior leadership at HEIs is the need to 'fix the women'. As noted by Burkinshaw and White (2017), interventions thus focus on assisting them to break through the 'glass ceiling'.

However, recent studies tend to identify structural institutional barriers as the root cause of the paucity of women in senior academic positions. Indeed, Burkinshaw and White (2017) assert that universities, rather than women, need to be fixed. For example, Shepherd (2017) argued that women's missing agency was an insufficient reason for their continued under-representation in leadership positions. She found little difference between men and women in terms of their aspiration for senior leadership. Rather, she noted the numerous institutional barriers that inhibit women's career progression. The 'glass ceiling' that hinders many women's progression to leadership positions within HEIs is cited by Maddrell et al. (2019).

The literature notes that universities have gendered institutional cultures, where the traditional cycle of male leadership is repeated, reinforcing male culture and leaving women feeling marginalised (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016). Leadership is often linked to masculinity traits such as competitiveness and ruthlessness, which are sometimes not attractive to women (Morley and Crossouard, 2015). Women do not always fit into the male-dominated culture and become isolated and lonely, experiencing tremendous pressure as a result. This gendered institutional culture is perpetuated through similarity attraction, where there is a tendency to attract people who are the same as their predecessors (Moodly and Toni, 2017). Referred to as homosociability (Shepherd, 2017), it has also been described as a form of cloning that perpetuates the gender gap (Gronn and Lacey, 2006) as it exerts a powerful influence on who is appointed or promoted. Women's minority status in senior ranks also leads to perceptions of tokenism, which exacerbates the pressure they are under (Craig and Feasel, 1998). It has been suggested that a critical mass of 35-40% women in leadership positions is necessary to overcome such stigma (Karsten, 1994).

Shepherd (2017) also pointed to male-dominated networks as a barrier to women's advancement. Networks are considered a form of social capital (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016); hence, if women are unable to access them, they are disadvantaged. Barnard et al. (2009) referred to the existence of a 'boys' club' that excludes women, leaving them feeling marginalised.

Formal and informal gendered practices, including conscious and unconscious bias with regard to women's achievements and capabilities, the roles they play, and the work they undertake, are also cited as important factors. Howe-Walsh and Turnbull's (2016) study that was based on in-depth interviews with women leaders also reported a lack of support and failure to celebrate their achievements.

Women leaders tend to be viewed and evaluated first as women and second as professionals or leaders. These ingrained assumptions play out through expectations and the treatment of men and women, as well as the way in which leadership is understood (Stead, 2015). A study of women leaders in higher education highlighted that senior women's leadership and professional expertise was rarely regarded as the norm. Women in senior leadership roles are placed in highly visible positions and accordingly judged as leaders and as women, rather than just as leaders, as is the case with their male counterparts (Fitzgerald, 2014).

Sexual harassment, intimidation and bullying behaviour sometimes emerge in a male-dominated culture and inhibit women's progression to senior leadership positions. Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2016) documented instances where women reported that their self-confidence was impacted, and in some cases, such behaviour made them fear for their personal safety.

Other factors posing a significant constraint in some contexts are socio-cultural belief systems, particularly those where gender stereotypes play a role and perpetuate what is regarded as gender appropriate behaviour. For example, Morley and Crossouard's (2015) study on women in higher education leadership in south Asia refers to the stereotype that women should not have authority over men, which negatively impacts their leadership. They also highlight that social class was a factor. Women from more privileged classes could rely on family support and cultural capital for assistance, which was not the case with their less privileged counterparts.

Furthermore, studies have found that some women in leadership positions tend to reproduce and embolden the patriarchal higher education system (Maphalala and Mpofu, 2017). These women replicate patriarchy by not supporting other women to achieve and progress to such positions – an approach referred to as the 'queen bee syndrome'.

Aim and Objectives

Mindful of the many barriers to women's academic leadership, our study reports on the gender dimension of the leadership profile at African research-intensive universities, which make up the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), a network of 16 universities across nine nations (https://arua.org.za/wp-content/uploads/ARUA-Concept.pdf accessed 24 August 2023). The countries covered include Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.

The study's objectives were to present gender-disaggregated statistics on the senior leadership at each university; conduct an online survey instrument to explore the barriers to women's accession to academic leadership positions, as well as the enabling factors, incorporating both men's and women's responses; and to make recommendations that would assist in closing the gender gap in senior leadership.

Companion papers on gender-based policies and strategies (Diab et al., 2023a) and sexual harassment (Diab et al., 2023b) at ARUA institutions, which form part of our overall intention to understand gender equality at these research-intensive universities, are in preparation.

Methodology

Data collection involved gathering relevant information on university leadership from the 16 participating universities' websites. All these institutions provided sufficient information on their websites, except for Cheik Anta Diop University (UCAD) in Senegal, where the information was incomplete. We found that the executive leadership teams at the 16 institutions changed often, even over the three-year period of our study. Our research was not designed to explore the underlying reasons for the high turnover but it is not considered uncommon when contract positions are the norm at senior leadership level. We therefore set October 2022 as the date to finalise the leadership profiles, recognising that the statistics reported may not be valid before or after that date.

The online survey instrument was distributed to both men and women senior leaders (Deans and above) at eight universities where we obtained ethical clearance. Obtaining country clearance so as to request research and ethical clearance at each of the participating universities was a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Long delays and a lack of responses from institutions were experienced. Ultimately, we were compelled to exclude eight universities from the online survey. While regrettable, a total of 46 responses (24 men, 21 women and one other) received from six institutions yielded a rich set of responses and enabled in-depth analysis. Since we were reliant on a university focal point to distribute the surveys, we were not able to determine the exact number of senior leaders who received the survey instrument; however, we estimate the response rate to be in the region of 30%. The responses received are disaggregated by institution and gender in Figure 1. It is noted that four were in South Africa, one in Ghana and one in Rwanda and that no responses were received from two of the targeted South African universities. Although South African institutions dominated, responses from Ghana comprised 43% of the sample, Rwanda 33% and South Africa, 24%.
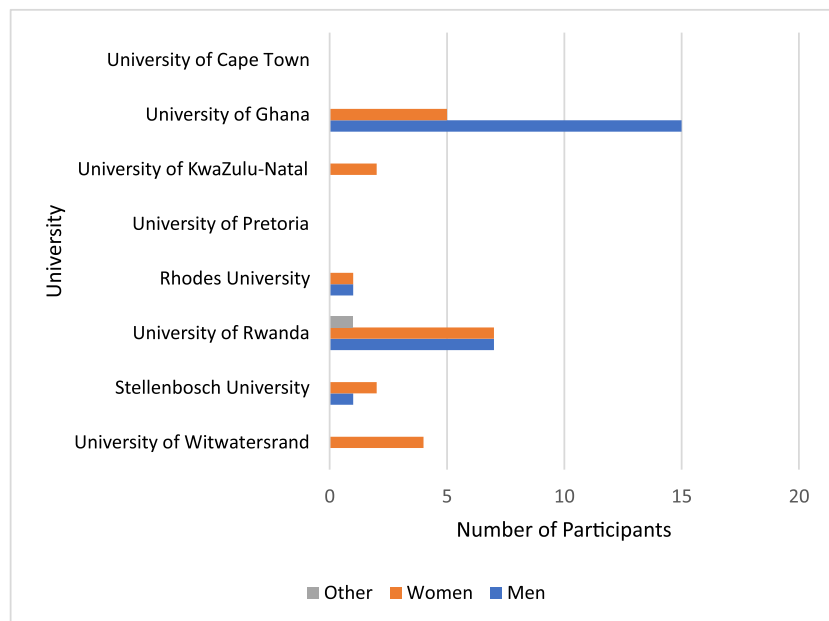
Figure 1: Number of survey respondents by institution and gender

Five questions were aimed at women leaders only and covered topics such as factors that had assisted them in their accession to a leadership position, their experiences at their current universities and interventions that institutions could implement to support them in their leadership roles. The remaining questions, answered by both men and women, covered factors such as obstacles to having more women in leadership, strategies/interventions that had been successful in advancing women to leadership positions, and how early-career women academics could best prepare themselves for leadership.

Leadership Profiles at ARUA Institutions

The senior leadership profile as extracted from university websites is documented from two perspectives, *viz.* the governance and the executive perspectives. The governance aspect includes the chair of the governing body, generally termed a Council, as well as the titular head of the university, usually known as a Chancellor. Some universities (e.g., those in Nigeria) have a position known as The Visitor, which is occupied by a senior government appointee. The senior executive management team generally comprises a VC (or Principal) and several Deputy VCs (DVCs), with the latter having various institution-wide responsibilities. The next level consists of the heads (usually Deans) of various discipline groupings, commonly termed faculties. Whilst there are structural differences amongst the institutions, it was nonetheless possible to obtain an overview of the gender dimension of senior university leadership.

Progress has been made in terms of female appointments as Council Chairs and Chancellors. While the Chancellor is a figurehead, the Chair of Council provides leadership to the Council and strategic direction to the university, and monitors the university executive's performance. Six institutions have female Council Chairs (43%) and eight have males. A similar breakdown was found for Chancellors. Information was missing for two institutions (Addis Ababa University (AAU) and UCAD).

Less progress was evident when it came to the executive head of the university, the VC, who holds the most powerful decision-making position and is responsible for academic programmes and administration. Only two of the 16 ARUA universities (the Universities of Cape Town (UCT)[1] and Ghana (UG)) have female VCs. At 13%, this is below international norms and indicative of a large gender gap that is reproduced at each level of leadership.

The percentage of women in the senior executive leadership team ranges from 25% (University of Dar es Salaam (USDM) to 75% (AAU)). The incumbents' decision-making powers vary across institutions, with most having considerable autonomy. The most gender-transformed institutions in terms of this measure are AAU, and the Universities of Ibadan (UI), Pretoria (UP) and the Witwatersrand (Wits), at which women make up 50% or above of senior executives. Figure 2 summarises the gender breakdown across all institutions and shows that the majority fall below 50%. In each case the VC, or equivalent, was excluded from the estimate of the female proportion of the executive team as these statistics were reported separately in the above paragraph. It is acknowledged that the size of executive teams differs among universities.
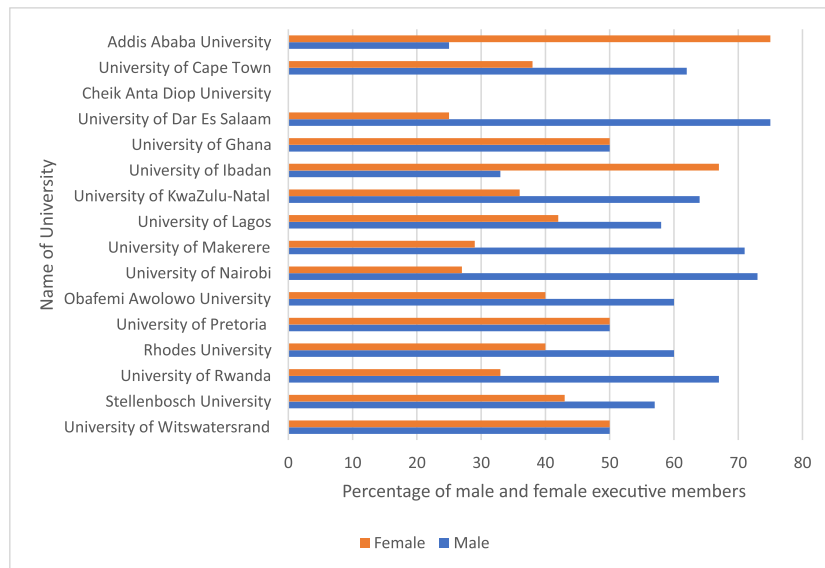
Figure 2: Senior leadership teams at ARUA institutions as a function of gender[2]

At the level of Deans, the percentage of female Deans is highly variable, ranging from 0% to 63%. Those with no female Deans were UG and Wits, while UCT is the only university with more than 50% representation. As shown in Figure 3, the majority (eight) have less than 30% female Deans. There was no consistent pattern linking particular faculties with female leadership.

The proportion of women in senior leadership positions is benchmarked against UNESCO statistics on that of female teachers in tertiary education for the countries where data are available, *viz.* Ghana (25%: 2021 data), Rwanda (19%: 2020 data) and Kenya (34%: 2019 data) (www.uis.unesco.org/# accessed 24 August 2023). Based on the overall pool of women available, the statistics generally reveal some positive intervention on the part of universities.
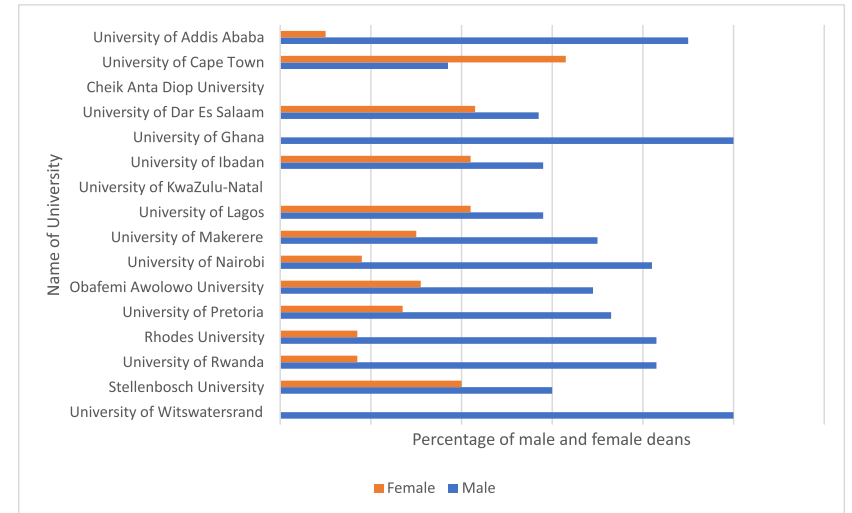

Figure 3: Percentage deans at ARUA institutions as a function of gender[3]

Respondents' Views on Women's Academic Leadership

Responses were received from both men and women from six universities across three African countries. In terms of *factors that played a role in their accession to leadership positions,* women ranked competence and experience as most important (Fig. 4). Factors such as luck and university policies/strategies did not feature strongly. The responses are a strong signal of belief in their own abilities and self-worth. The low number of responses for university policies suggests that they do not regard themselves as affirmative action appointees.

In terms of *support that women received in their accession to a leadership role,* the responses were spread across many factors (Fig. 5), with support from colleagues and junior staff the most often cited. Support evidently emanates from many quarters but is embedded in the institution and family.
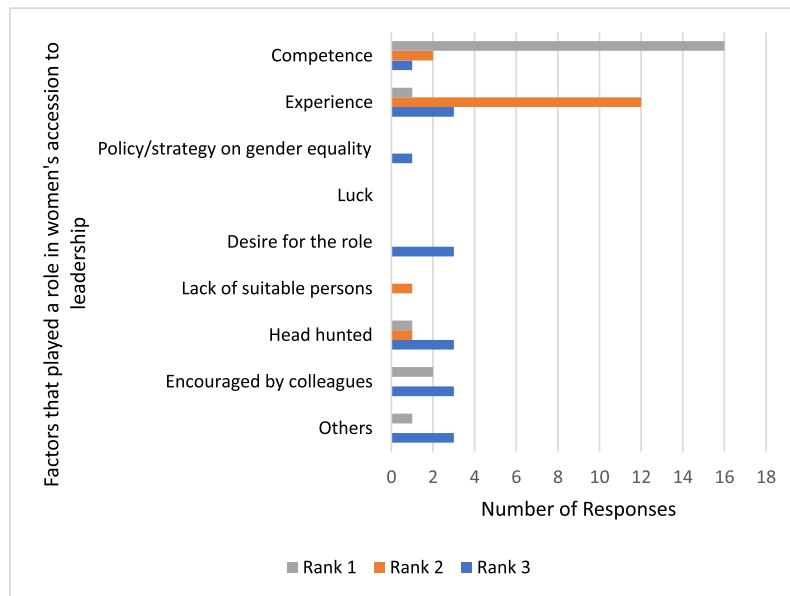
Figure 4: Factors that played a role in women's accession to leadership positions
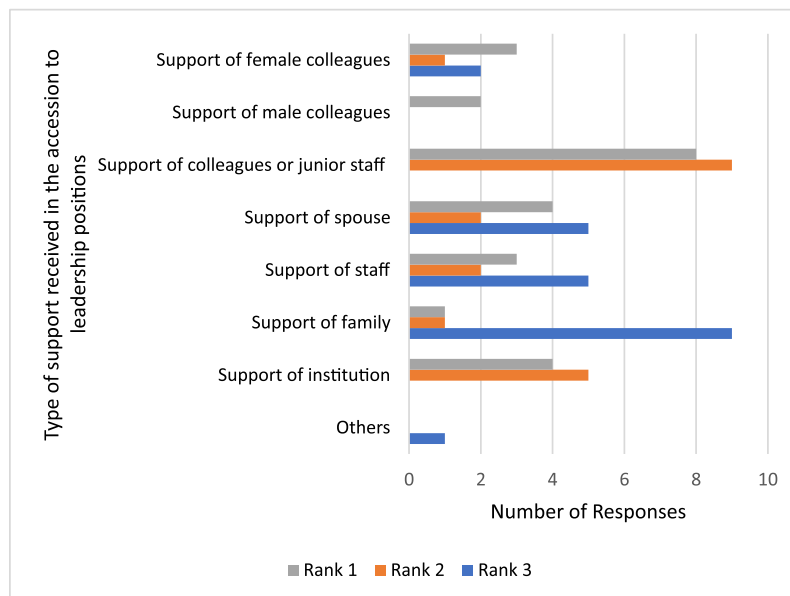

Figure 5: Type of support women received

In their responses to an open-ended question on *how universities could support women who aspired to leadership positions*, the primary need mentioned by almost half (ten) of the women respondents, was for "mentoring or coaching". None of the respondents made specific mention of a need for sponsorship, which, alongside mentorship, is acknowledged in the literature as a powerful means to overcome gender inequalities (Thorne, 2020). De Vries and Binns (2018:6) define sponsorship as "the active and deliberative use of power to facilitate the careers of others". It includes empowering, advocating and encouraging women to succeed. Structured mentorship programmes in leadership, as well as sponsorship programmes are interventions which an institution can readily introduce, and the beneficiaries need not only be women.

Another cluster of responses related to "avoiding discrimination". Implicit in these is an indication that, whether conscious or unconscious, gender bias existed. This suggested the need for gender equality training to raise awareness and nurture knowledge and skills that underpin changes in behaviour. Again, this is something that is relatively easy for an institution to address.

The "need for additional resources" and more control over such also featured, including one respondent who cited a need for more support staff.

A fourth cluster of comments related to "improved systems, policies, and information flow". There was also a call for "greater recognition".

A question pertaining to *obstacles to having more women in leadership positions* was answered by both men and women. Respondents were asked to rank their top five preferences from a predetermined list. There were marked differences in men and women's responses. For men, the factors that scored the highest were "the lack of suitably qualified women" (16 responses in the top five ranks) and "the reluctance of women to take on leadership positions" (15 responses), followed by "socio-cultural belief systems" (12 responses). In contrast, women mentioned "institutional culture that favours men over women" (11 responses), while nine responses related to "unconscious bias", "poor networking opportunities", "poor implementation of family-friendly policies" and "socio-cultural belief systems", respectively. They did not ascribe importance to the unavailability of women candidates. Women's responses aligned closely with factors such as gendered institutional

cultures (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016) and male-dominated networks (Shepherd, 2017), referred to in the literature.

The wide gender gap in understanding of obstacles to women's leadership is of concern and could hamper future gender transformation at university leadership level. Men placed responsibility for women's under-representation on women themselves – too few were suitably qualified, and women did not aspire to senior leadership positions. Interestingly, men ranked the assertion that women were under-qualified above low numbers of women (16 and 10 responses, respectively). In contrast, women's responses pointed to systemic institutional failures that inhibited their accession to leadership roles. Bridging this perception divide will require interventions on the part of institutions. There were some areas of agreement which could offer a starting point for strategies aimed at closing the gender gap. For instance, low visibility of qualified women received eight responses from women and ten from men.

An open-ended question asked all respondents to identify the *strategies/interventions to appoint more women to leadership positions* that had worked for them at their university or at other universities with which they are familiar. Again, "formal mentoring and coaching programmes" were prioritised, with the majority suggesting that such programmes specifically target women. Closely allied was the mention of role models, particularly senior women. There was recognition of the oft-held view that women do not promote themselves as well as men (Herbst, 2020) and a call to "make women more visible" by giving them opportunities to speak at public events and highlighting their achievements. One respondent suggested "raising awareness in women first that they are capable of doing what men can do", a reference to the 'fixing the women' approach referred to earlier. There was also a suggestion to facilitate improved networking opportunities for women. Six respondents noted that women needed "encouragement" to take up leadership positions. The role of policy that sets targets or quotas for women in leadership positions was also mentioned.

Responses related to a need for "family-friendly policies" and "flexible working hours" were raised almost exclusively by women. Such policies are required to ensure that women do not lose momentum in their careers. It was noted that women often juggle work and family responsibilities and there were calls for subsidised childcare and childcare facilities close to the university.

In probing *how early-career women could best prepare themselves for leadership positions*, "mentorship and the identification of role models" was again the dominant theme. There was a strong call for structured mentoring programmes. It is acknowledged that some universities have made great strides in their leadership mentoring programmes. Most examples we found existed at South African institutions where the drive to transform the racial profile of university leadership has simultaneously benefitted the gender profile. Wilson-Tagoe (2015) draws attention to mentorship of women academics in leadership in Ghana.

A second preparatory factor was "building one's academic reputation" through prioritising research and publishing. There was broad recognition that academics establish a reputation through research. "Engaging broadly across the university" was another theme. Suggestions were also made to not only focus on teaching and research, but to participate in committees and to engage in faculty issues to understand the university and how it functions. Other suggestions spoke directly to early-career women's personal development and included "the establishment of personal goals", emphasising the importance of early preparation; "building confidence" through improving communication skills and believing in oneself; "networking and building relationships"; and ensuring good "family support".

The overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) supported the closing of the gender gap in university leadership. Reasons given included the importance of a "diversity of perspectives" in an organisation that would benefit, enrich, and legitimise decision-making. Included within the same theme were views that women's leadership style is different and that it is important to utilise their skills sets to have a broader impact on society. Another broad theme related to "human rights and equal opportunities". It was noted that women make up half the population; thus, it is important to ensure equality, and that failure to do so would be a waste of human potential.

There were a few negative responses citing issues such as, "*I think that appointment to leadership position should be based on competence and not gender*" and others that drew attention to cultural beliefs and stereotypes and highlighted women's many responsibilities in the home.

Enablers of Women's Leadership

Our study highlighted mentoring, increasing women's visibility, family-friendly policies, and networking opportunities as important enabling factors identified by women. Others cited in the literature include promoting inclusive workplaces and emphasising the leadership characteristics required for the 21st century rather than relying on stereotypical characteristics (Fitzgerald, 2014). Stead (2015) suggested a shift in the focus of leadership research from one where leadership style is at the centre, which tends to reinforce traditional stereotypes, to one that focuses on how leadership works, how gendered practices are perpetuated, and how we can propose alternative models.

The enablers highlight policy and cultural changes that are required in institutions, as well as universities' responsibility to mentor and showcase women academics so that the gender gap in academic leadership can be closed.

Summary and Conclusion

This article presented gender-disaggregated statistics on the leadership profile at ARUA institutions to provide context on the leadership gender gap at Africa's leading research-intensive universities. In summary, the gender gap at the level of VC, the executive head of the university and the most powerful decision-maker, was striking. Women represented only 13% of VCs and if one excluded UCT, where the female VC had recently vacated her position, there was only one university among 16 with a female head.

While women's representation in executive leadership teams and at the level of Deans varied considerably across universities, half had less than 50% women in their executive teams and half had less than 30% female Deans.

An online survey instrument administered at eight of the institutions, with responses from six universities spread across South Africa, Ghana and Rwanda, offered insights into women's views on factors that had played a role in their accession to leadership positions, support that they had received, and how their universities could best support them. Women ranked competence and experience as the most important factors in their leadership accession, indicative of belief in their own abilities and self-worth. They expressed a need for mentoring,

measures to address discrimination and greater visibility.

A wide gender gap was apparent in men's and women's understanding of obstacles to having more women in leadership positions. Men placed responsibility for under-representation on women, stating that too few were suitably qualified, and that women did not aspire to senior leadership positions. In contrast, women pointed to systemic institutional failures.

Formal mentoring and coaching programmes emerged as the dominant successful interventions. Suggestions made to enable early-career women to best prepare themselves for leadership positions were to take advantage of mentoring programmes, build their research reputation through publications, and build their confidence through improved communication skills.

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(Endnotes)

1   At the time of finalising this article, the UCT VC had vacated her position and had been replaced by a male Acting VC.

2   Data for UCAD were not available on their website.

3   Data for UCAD were not available on their website and UKZN leadership structures did not include Deans.