



Status of Women Involvement in Government-owned Universities and Church-owned Universities Leadership in North Kivu Province, DRC

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Abstract: *The proportion of women in school administration remains a worldwide major educational concern, especially since women are more numerous in the teaching career and yet less represented in school leadership. This study investigated the status of women involvement in in Government-owned universities and Church-owned universities leadership in North Kivu Province, DRC. The researcher employed both quantitative and qualitative methods and the research design was descriptive-comparative. The study selected all the administrators of 17 institutions of those sub-conferences of Butembo and Beni. The target population for this study were 16 universities of higher learning of North Kivu Provinces of Democratic Republic of Congo. The researcher used primary data obtained from questionnaire, interview and observation checklist. This study used self-administered questionnaire. Thereafter, data was analyzed with the help of SPSS. The study established that the church owned universities, had a good representation of women leadership (2.50 – 3.49 good representation) as compared to the government owned universities having a fair representation (1.50 – 2.49 fair representation). University ownership whether government or church does not significantly affect women involvement in university leadership within the sampled institutions (p-value of 0.183). The study recommended that while church-owned universities show relatively better representation, both church and government institutions should adopt proactive gender equity strategies to ensure balanced leadership representation. Since ownership type does not significantly influence women's leadership involvement, a unified framework addressing gender equity should be implemented across all universities, focusing on shared structural and cultural challenges.*

Keywords: Leadership, Government-owned universities, Church-owned universities.

Masika, B., Wahonya, P. & Kiptok, G. C. (2026). Status of Women Involvement in Government-owned Universities and Church-owned Universities Leadership in North Kivu Province, DRC. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(3), 890 – 897. <https://doi.org/10.59765/nyw36>

1. Introduction

The proportion of women in school administration remains a worldwide major educational concern. Especially since women are more numerous in the teaching career and yet less represented in school leadership. In the USA, a 2013 report issued by the American Council of Education (ACE) titled “On the Pathway to the Presidency” documented that woman then comprised 43% of senior administrators in all types of US higher education institutions. Another 2017 report released by the College and University Professional

Association for Human Resources found that women held approximately 50% of all administrative positions in higher education across the United States, with actual representation varying depending on the type of both positions and institutions.

The OECD report that over the past two decades, the gender employment gap in Canada has declined by 9 percentage points and in 2011, 69% of women (vs. 75% men) of working-age (15-64 years) were employed. This is above the OECD average of 60%. Nevertheless, women are less likely than men to climb the career ladder and are twice as

likely to work part-time (27%) as compared to men (12%). In 2009, the proportion of women on boards of listed companies in Canada was one of the lowest (6%) in the OECD (10%), and a significant percentage of listed companies (42%) had no women on their boards, yet changes are being made. The Province of Québec, for example, has made gender parity on the boards of its crown corporations a statutory requirement.

The European continent is also among those promoting equal opportunities in the workplace. According to Austrian universities female representation in rectorate in Austrian universities: Since the introduction of the quota regulation for university bodies in 2009, the share of female rectors and vice-rectors at Austrian universities has risen: from 21.6% in 2005 to 47.9% in 2017. The most significant rise was seen in 2011, when the share of women increased by around 10 percentage points (from 32% in 2010 to 41% in 2011) (Wroblewski, 2019).

Women leaders in higher education are disproportionately more likely to lead smaller colleges or women's universities, particularly in South Asian countries, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (Cheung, 2021). According to Cheung (2021), the top national universities in Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong, or public universities that have entered the highest ranks of the international league tables are not led by woman presidents.

The percentage of women employed in some of African universities is also shocking. In South Africa, the government and its leadership have been committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women, but institutions of higher education have not been quick to emulate the government's example. Survey data on South Africa, reported by Gumbi (2006), showed that in 2003, the average number of women in senior management was approximately 24% across 17 institutions of higher learning.

Representation of women at Council level (the highest governance structure at higher education institutions) across the 8 institutions was 20% women and 80% men, and only 15% of senior management were women. Representation of women at middle management was slightly better at 27% (UNCFSP-TELP, 2006). Men also dominated positions at professorial and senior lecturer positions (Kiambavi, 2008). Shober, (2014) report that "successful South African women professors do have strong publication records and high qualifications, but also received good teaching evaluations and were involved in community work." They really are the super women that they are expected to be, excelling in all four pillars of institutional life. He argues that endogenous factors such as perception of the changing processes in higher education, self-perception, mentorship, and networking

can act as transformative agencies for women succeeding in higher education.

Shober, (2014) adds that the issues prompting women sociologists to leave academia also noted racial respondent diversity. They discovered that young black female academics were more concerned with issues surrounding race whereas older white female academics concentrated on gender-related issues. The researchers concluded that "racial challenges overshadow gender challenges for black female academics in South Africa and that gender discrimination is only experienced once women reach more senior academic positions".

This fact has been revealed by the survey done across 10 African countries in 2007 Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe and found that "even though women constitute over 50% of the higher education, workforce, only 8% were vice chancellors and 12% were registrars; while 21% of women were appointed as deputy vice chancellors and executive directors (Nyoni & He, 2019).

A 2017 article mentioned by Nakamanya and others indicated Uganda had just three female vice-chancellors in its more than 50 universities. At mid-level, the number of female leaders was minimal. For instance, Makerere University, which is the biggest institution of higher learning in the country, employed only one female principal in its 10 colleges (Agaba, 2021).

In DRC, the law gives boys and girls equal access to education, and education is free and compulsory until the age of 16. However, armed conflict had reduced school attendance. The number of girls in secondary education had fallen because of psychological barriers, customs, early pregnancy and poverty.

In Bukavu, in the province of South Kivu, at least there are three higher and university lead by women out of more than twenty in the city institutions. In the management committees of these institutions, they are poorly represented. In South Kivu, women fight to increase their representation in management committees within universities. Likewise, the DRC pursues its objective of promoting equal opportunities for all. Therefore, this study investigated the status of women involvement in Government-owned universities and Church-owned universities leadership in North Kivu Province, DRC. In addition, the study investigated a significant difference in women involvement in university leadership between Government-owned and Church-owned universities in North Kivu Province, DRC.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Women continue to be seriously underrepresented in leadership roles in higher education institutions although there has been an international effort to ensure gender parity and inclusion in leadership. Women are an important part of the global academic community, yet they continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles like Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Principals, Deans and governing bodies of universities. Despite gains in educational achievement and participation in the workforce, evidence from North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa shows that institutional, socio-cultural, and organizational constraints remain in place to hinder women's progress to leadership positions.

The situation in Africa is even more alarming. Research has been carried out to identify that despite women being more than half of the higher education workforce in several African countries, a small proportion hold leadership positions. This has been seen in South Africa, Uganda and other Sub-Saharan African nations. National policies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) foster gender equality and equal educational opportunities for women, yet they are not sufficiently represented in leadership positions in universities. Current data from South Kivu shows that few higher education institutions have a female head and there are few women in the university management committees. There is however little empirical evidence on the status of women's participation in leadership in universities in North Kivu Province, especially on government owned universities and church owned universities.

In addition, while it is believed that institutional ownership may have an impact on leadership opportunities within the university, there is limited empirical evidence to identify the differences in the leadership participation of women between Government-owned and Church-owned Universities in North Kivu Province. The lack of this knowledge hampers the ability of policy makers, university governing councils and university leaders to develop evidence-based strategies to improve gender equality in university leadership. The aim of this study was, therefore, to find out the level of women's participation in leadership roles in government owned and church owned universities and to find out whether there are significant differences between the two types of universities in North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

2. Literature Review

The woman Involvement in the leadership of higher institutions depends from many factors. Therefore, in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG),

which seeks to achieve gender equality, empower women, and ensure their effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all decision-making levels in political, economic, and public life, this work is relevant because "Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world" (United Nations [UN] 2022).

Given the above, female academics experience the profession differently than their male colleagues, as they experience micro inequities and small events that cause them to remain silent or be directly silenced, as in the case of Asian countries where the hierarchical culture forces women to assume dutiful attitudes and relegates them to traditional household tasks (Aiston & Fo, 2021).

As females, they are less likely to be tenured, tend to publish less, receive less external funding, have fewer indicators of research prestige, and spend more time teaching (Aiston, 2014). Even though women are more likely to be authors and leaders in publications in bold/innovative and resistance spaces, they still tend to publish less (Acai *et al.*, 2022). Despite greater attention to gender issues in advanced countries, some gaps have yet to close.

These gaps include traditionally masculinized areas of knowledge such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (Li, 2020); Geography, where sustained leadership is needed to address the inequalities experienced in the workplace (Maddrell *et al.*, 2016); Agricultural Sciences, which have historically been a male-influenced field (Niewoehner-Green *et al.*, 2022); and Tourism, in terms of performance indicators (Pritchard & Morgan, 2017), among others. Likewise, global neoliberalism trends intensify a neutral scope in academic work where such neutrality blurs gender equity (Brabazon & Schulz, 2020).

A case in point is a study by Rauhaus and Carr (2020), who comment that in the division of academic labor, female faculty members assume a disproportionate amount of advising and mentoring responsibilities, which reduces their likelihood of rising to leadership positions in their institutions. Due to the impact of neoliberal values and underlying systemic structures, male academics are often favored or privileged. For this reason, Gouthro *et al.*, (2018) propose incorporating a critical feminist perspective into the concept of organization as a model in the higher education sector, and authors like Acker, (2012) suggest understanding the experience of female academic leadership based on differentiated analytical frameworks.

Notwithstanding the above and despite neoliberal trends, some women have managed to overcome certain crises and barriers inherent in the academic trajectory and in being a woman and they have reconciled their personal and

professional lives, which has allowed them to prevail (Dimici, 2015). The social predictors that help women establish their professional trajectory include parental influence, spousal support, and collegial support from male academics among others (OTI, 2013).

This remains the concern of several authors such as Buchmann & DiPrete, (2006) discuss about a phenomenon called “the female advantage”, a concept that has been used since 1990 to refer to the phenomenon of women’s incursion into the workplace where their talents, skills, and ideas were highlighted; in the academic field, this is manifested by the rise of women to relevant positions and reflected in the ascent of women to this level. This is globally seen in increased female enrolment compared to male enrolment between 2000 and 2018, as the gross enrolment rate of men in higher education increased from 19% to 36%, while that of women increased from 19% to 41% (UNESCO, 2021). Although, such a phenomenon predicts an increase in coming years (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013), paradoxically, the female advantage does not go hand in hand with women occupying the majority of academic positions in universities after graduation, participating in relevant research, taking on leadership roles, or even earning competitive and comparable salaries as recorded in the United Nations report (2021), (UNESCO, 2021).

Independent Variables

Despite this high representation of women as students, by 2012, about 86% of all presidents, provosts, and chancellors were male, and 75% of full professors were males. Additionally, data indicates female professors, when compared to males, move up the career ladder slower, are less productive, have heavier teaching loads, and have lower salaries (Patsy Parker, 2015). The DRC for its part in its Constitution (2006, p.13) stipulates that on the national legislative level, the Congolese government developed a National Action Plan in 2010 for the implementation of Resolution 1325. This commits to increasing the participation of women in decision-making bodies. In addition, gender parity is clearly enshrined in article 14 of the Constitution: “Women have the right to equitable representation within national, provincial and local institutions.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

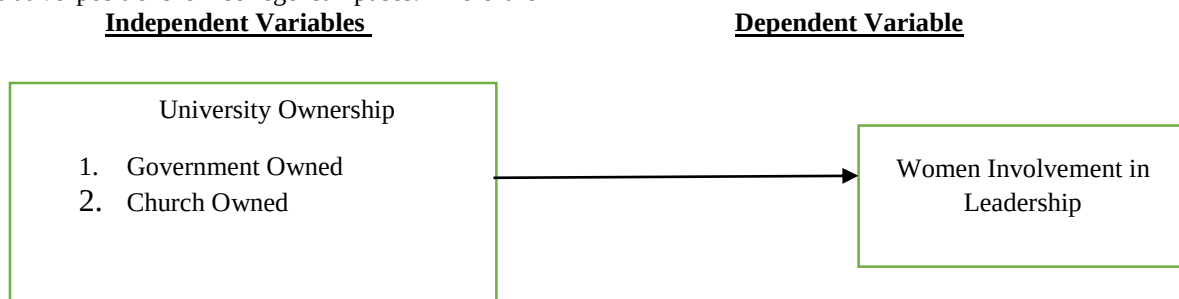


Figure 1 above shows the conceptual framework of this study. The two independent variables (government ownership and church ownership) are posited to have a significant effect on the dependent variable (women involvement in leadership). This means that women involvement in leadership in the universities depends on the ownership of the universities. The researcher asked the following research questions:

1. What is the status of women's involvement in university leadership in North Kivu Province (DRC) in terms of government-owned and church-owned universities?
2. Is there a significant difference in women's involvement in university leadership between government-owned and church-owned universities in North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-comparative research design using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The descriptive aspect of the study enabled the researcher to describe and measure the level of women's involvement in leadership within universities in North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo.

3.2 Research Setting

The context of this study are the two districts of Lubero and Beni, where the two higher-education zones are located, including the sub-conferences of Butembo and Beni. These two districts have the highest number of HEIs. The study selected all administrators from 12 institutions within the sub-conferences of Butembo and Beni to evaluate women's involvement in the leadership of higher institutions.

3.3 Population and Sampling Techniques

The target population for this study was 16 Universities in the North Kivu Province of the DRC. The study population included 290 administrators from these universities. Therefore, the target population for this study comprised 290 administrators from the 16 universities of higher learning in North Kivu Province, DRC. The population of administrators in Government- sponsored universities was 153 men and 25 women, and church-sponsored was 87 men and 25 women.

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The study used multistage sampling where sampling is carried out in two or more stages. The researcher used convenience sampling to sample the 12 Universities in North Kivu, DRC because they were the only universities accessible due to the ongoing conflict in the region. This study used purposive sampling techniques to sample the administrators of the 12 universities among other university employees. In addition, the researcher employed census sampling to sample all the 220 administrators from 12 universities (Shinija, 2023). The population of administrators in Government- sponsored universities was 90 men and 26 women and Church- sponsored is 79 men and 25 women, chosen according to viability criteria.

3.4 Data Collection

The researcher sought permission from the graduate studies of University of Eastern Africa Baraton which was used to obtain the Ministry of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation's Scientific Research and Technological Innovation Permit. Then the researcher sought permission from the DR's Ministry of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation. The researcher collected data herself by distributing the questionnaire, interview guide, and checklist, and allowing them to fill in their responses. Data was collected from the respondents by their responding to the questionnaires and interview.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 for Windows 10 for statistical analysis. Reliability and validity were tested using Cronbach's alpha. For descriptive data, the researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques during data analysis. Descriptive statistics included the mean and standard deviations. Inferential statistics included the T-test. For qualitative data, the researcher used thematic analysis to summarize and analyses data obtained from the interview guides. For this study, qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher considered voluntary participation and requested that respondents participate by providing them with information relevant to the study. The respondents were presented with the consent form, which provided information about the study. The study was also presented to the University of Eastern Africa-Baraton's ethical committees and the Ministry of Scientific Research and Technological Innovation of the DRC before administering the research instruments to the respondents, and a letter of permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Graduate School. The institutions and respondents of the

study were assured of the report's integrity. In addition, the report of the research findings was honest. Finally, the researcher expressed appreciation to the respondents after the data collection.

4.1 Status of Women Involvement in University Leadership in North Kivu Province, DRC

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Status of Women Involvement in University Leadership in North Kivu Province, DRC.

Descriptive Statistics				
Institution		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Government owned	In my university, men and women have equal opportunities for leadership roles.	84	2.79	.906
	In my university, gender plays a role on leadership opportunities	84	2.45	.798
	In my university, family responsibilities affect ability of women to pursue or maintain a leadership role.	84	2.35	.898
	Family duties influence the career aspirations of women in my university	84	2.43	.935
	Gender stereotypes affecting women in leadership roles in my university	83	2.19	.818
	Average	84	2.442	.871
Church owned	In my university, men and women have equal opportunities for leadership roles.	31	3.16	.820
	In my university, gender plays a role on leadership opportunities	30	2.80	.805
	In my university, family responsibilities affect ability of women to pursue or maintain a leadership role.	31	2.35	.798
	Family duties influence the career aspirations of women in my university	31	2.16	.934
	Gender stereotypes affecting women in leadership roles in my university	31	2.16	.898
	Average	31	2.526	.851

Source: Researcher's field data (2025)

As indicated in table 3 above, respondents from church owned universities agreed that in their universities, men and women have equal opportunities for leadership roles while their counterparts in government owned universities disagreed with means of 3.16 and 2.79 and standard deviations of 0.820 and 0.906. Respondents in both universities disagreed that in their universities, gender plays a role on leadership opportunities, family responsibilities affect ability of women to pursue or maintain a leadership role, family duties influence the career aspirations of women in their universities and gender stereotypes affecting women in leadership roles in their universities with means ranging from 2.16 to 2.80 and standard deviation ranging from 0.798 to 0.935.

On average, the finding of this study yielded a better mean of 2.526 and standard deviation of 0.851 for church owned

universities as compared to 2.442 and a standard deviation of 0.871 for government owned universities. Based on the mean scale interpretation for this study, the findings mean that for church owned universities, respondents indicated a good representation of women leadership (2.50 – 3.49 good representation) as compared to the government owned universities where the respondents indicated a fair representation (1.50 – 2.49 fair representation).

4.2 Statistically Significant Difference in Women Involvement in University Leadership Between Government-owned and Church-owned Universities in North Kivu Province, DRC

Table 2: Difference in Women Involvement in University Leadership

		Independent Samples Test							
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper
Status of Women Involvement in Leadership	Equal variances assumed	1.799	.183	-.809	106	.420	-.39808	.49184	-1.37320 .57704
	Equal variances not assumed			-.884	59.983	.380	-.39808	.45028	-1.29877 .50261

Source: Researcher's field data (2025)

Table 2 above table presents the test of statistically significant difference between the means of status of women involvement in leadership in government owned and church owned universities. The statistically significant difference was determined at 0.05 significance level. The results of the independent samples t-test compare the status of women involvement in university leadership in North Kivu province. Specifically, the p-value was 0.183, meaning the difference in the status of women involvement in leadership between government owned and church owned universities is not statistically significant.

The analysis revealed a p-value of 0.183 when comparing women's involvement in leadership between government-owned and church-owned universities, indicating no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 threshold. This means that institutional ownership whether public or religious does not significantly affect how women participate in university leadership within the sampled institutions.

4.3 Discussion

The study reveals a clear distinction in the perceived status of women's leadership across different types of institutions. Respondents from church-owned universities reported a higher mean score, indicating a generally favorable perception of women's involvement in leadership within these settings. Conversely, government-owned universities exhibited a slightly lower mean, suggesting that while women do participate in leadership, their visibility and influence are perceived as comparatively limited. The lower standard deviation in church-owned institutions reflects a more uniform perception among respondents, while the slightly higher variation in government-owned institutions points to differing experiences and levels of consensus.

These findings may be attributed to differences in institutional values, policy enforcement, and support systems that either enhance or hinder women's advancement into leadership positions. The results underscore the importance of targeted strategies in government institutions to promote gender equity and bolster the status of female leaders.

This observation aligns with Njoni (2022), who noted that women in church-affiliated leadership roles were commonly involved in operational and decision-making activities, though often underrepresented at strategic and oversight levels. Nonetheless, the study emphasized that church institutions have increasingly embraced women's leadership, particularly in contexts where cultural and theological frameworks encourage gender equity. Similarly, Bwire (2020) observed that while many African church institutions were historically male-dominated, they are progressively integrating women into leadership as part of broader efforts to achieve inclusive institutional growth. This transformation is largely influenced by reinterpretations of theology, advocacy efforts, and gender-conscious policy reforms.

In contrast, the slightly lower rating in government-owned institutions may reflect limitations arising from rigid bureaucracies, deep-seated gender norms, and delayed policy implementation. Collectively, these findings and supporting literature suggest that institutional ethos whether faith-based or secular plays a critical role in shaping both the perceived and actual participation of women in leadership.

The finding of no significant difference on how women participate in university leadership implies that both types of universities may face similar challenges or benefit from

comparable opportunities in fostering women's leadership. Factors such as societal norms, cultural expectations, and institutional policies likely exert a uniform influence across these institutions, making ownership less impactful than previously assumed. Consequently, strategies to enhance women's leadership should target broader, cross-cutting issues rather than focusing solely on the type of university.

This finding aligns with research by Oplatka and Arar (2020) and Mugisha and Mugisha (2021), who argue that while institutional structures can influence policy, progress in gender equity hinges more on addressing systemic and cultural dynamics. Thus, strengthening structural reforms and implementing inclusive leadership policies universally across institutions is key to fostering women's advancement into leadership roles.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following main conclusions could be drawn; Church-owned universities demonstrate better representation of women in leadership compared to government-owned institutions, suggesting that religious institutions may be more proactive or effective in promoting gender inclusivity in leadership roles. The lack of a statistically significant difference implies that ownership structure (church or government) does not inherently affect women's participation in university leadership, highlighting that other factors may play a more critical role.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

1. While church-owned universities show relatively better representation, both church and government institutions should adopt proactive gender equity strategies to ensure balanced leadership representation.
2. Since ownership type does not significantly influence women's leadership involvement, a unified framework addressing gender equity should be implemented across all universities, focusing on shared structural and cultural challenges.

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