



Influence of Socio-political Factors on Women Involvement in Leadership in Government-owned and Church-owned Universities in North Kivu Province (DRC)

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Abstract: This study investigated the Influence of Socio-political Factors on Women Involvement in Leadership in Government-owned and Church-owned Universities 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 16 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 three research instruments: questionnaire, interview guide and a check list. Thereafter, data was analyzed with the help of SPSS. Level of education, management style and criteria for appointing are very influential on women involvement in university leadership (2.50 – 3.49 very influential). Politics and social cultures are slightly influential on women involvement in university leadership (1.50 – 2.49 slightly influential). There is no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between government and church-owned universities in how educational qualifications affect women's leadership. There is a statistically significant difference in the influence of management style on women involvement in university leadership between government owned and church owned universities (p -value of 0.009). There is no statistically significant difference in the influence of level of education ($p=0.193$), political factors ($p=0.128$), criteria for appointment ($p = 0.791$) and cultural factors ($p = 0.348$) on women involvement in university leadership between government owned and church owned universities.

Keywords: Socio-political Factors, Leadership, Government-owned Universities, Church-owned Universities.

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1. Introduction

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within higher education remains a significant global concern despite women constituting a substantial proportion of the teaching workforce. International frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 and UNESCO policies emphasize gender equality and women's participation in decision-

making as essential for democratic governance, inclusive development, and institutional effectiveness (Madsen & Longman, 2020). Although women's enrolment in universities has increased globally, they continue to occupy fewer senior academic and administrative positions compared to men. Studies from the United States and other regions indicate that women are more likely to hold lower-level leadership positions and are underrepresented in prestigious institutions. Similar patterns are observed in Asia and Africa, where socio-cultural expectations,

patriarchal structures, and gender stereotypes continue to restrict women's advancement into leadership roles (Wroblewski, 2019).

In Africa, the African Union Agenda 2063 and gender equality strategies advocate for women's empowerment and participation in leadership. However, many countries continue to experience substantial disparities between policy commitments and implementation (Pillay, 2025). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Constitution of 2006 and Law No. 15/013 of 2015 on Gender Equality provide a legal framework for eliminating discrimination against women and promoting gender parity in public institutions and employment. These laws support equal opportunities, equitable recruitment, and work–family balance policies. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of these provisions remains limited due to persistent socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. Patriarchal norms, discriminatory practices, and limited institutional support continue to marginalize women and restrict their access to leadership positions, particularly within higher education institutions.

The situation is more complex in North Kivu Province, a region severely affected by prolonged armed conflict, insecurity, and socio-economic instability. The conflict has disrupted educational systems, weakened institutional governance, increased gender-based violence, and intensified poverty and displacement. Women and girls are disproportionately affected through limited educational access, reduced economic opportunities, and heightened insecurity. Universities in North Kivu also face structural challenges, including inadequate funding, weak governance systems, lack of transparent promotion procedures, and absence of gender-responsive institutional policies. Organizational cultures within these institutions often favour male leadership dominance while limiting mentorship and advancement opportunities for women. Consequently, women's participation in university leadership remains significantly low despite existing legal and policy frameworks.

Existing literature demonstrates that gender inequalities in the DRC are interconnected across education, employment, and leadership. Cultural norms favour boys' education, while poverty, early marriage, and insecurity contribute to girls' school dropout rates and limited career progression. These inequalities subsequently affect women's participation in formal employment and leadership positions. Although several studies have examined gender representation and women's empowerment in the DRC, limited research has specifically focused on the socio-political dimensions influencing women's involvement in university leadership within North Kivu Province. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by analyzing the structural, cultural, political, and institutional factors

affecting women's participation in leadership in selected universities in North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

1.1 Research Problem

Despite global, regional, and national commitments to gender equality, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions within higher education institutions. According to ESSA's State of Women Leading Report (2022), women continue to occupy very few top leadership positions in universities and colleges across Sub-Saharan Africa, where only 2.5% serve as vice-chancellors and 5% as chief executive officers. This persistent gender imbalance exists despite international frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goal 5, which advocates women's full and effective participation in leadership and decision-making, and the African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018–2028), which promotes equal opportunities for women in public and institutional leadership.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Constitution under Article 14 guarantees the elimination of discrimination against women and promotes equal representation in all sectors of national life. Likewise, the Status of Higher and University Education Personnel in the DRC (1981) emphasizes non-discriminatory recruitment based on qualifications. Faith-based institutions such as the Catholic Church and the Seventh-day Adventist Church also advocate gender equality and recognize the equal dignity and worth of men and women in leadership and service. However, despite these legal, institutional, and religious commitments, women remain inadequately represented in leadership positions within higher education institutions, particularly in North Kivu Province.

The underrepresentation of women in university leadership is strongly influenced by socio-political factors that shape access to leadership opportunities and decision-making processes. Deeply rooted patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes continue to portray leadership as a male responsibility while assigning women domestic and caregiving roles. Institutional environments within universities also contribute to this problem. Limited mentorship opportunities, weak professional networks, lack of gender-sensitive policies, and unsupportive organizational cultures reduce women's participation in leadership. In conflict-affected regions such as North Kivu, the situation is worsened by insecurity, sociopolitical instability, and fragile governance systems, which influence administrative appointments and reinforce gender inequalities in institutional leadership structures.

Empirical evidence demonstrates the seriousness of the problem. According to INP-DRC (2020), women

constituted only 3.5% of qualified personnel in higher education institutions across the country. In North Kivu Province, women represented only 5.61% of higher education personnel, with particularly low representation in administration and faculty leadership positions. Although previous studies have identified cultural barriers, discrimination, and gender stereotypes as major obstacles to women's leadership participation, little research has specifically examined how socio-political factors influence women's involvement in leadership within universities in the sub-conferences of Butembo and Beni.

Furthermore, limited studies have investigated how governance systems, appointment procedures, institutional power relations, and political dynamics affect women's access to leadership positions in higher education institutions in North Kivu. This gap in knowledge creates a need for context-specific research to examine the influence of socio-political factors on women's involvement in leadership in selected universities in the sub-conferences of Butembo and Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze how socio-political factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in higher education institutions and to generate evidence that may support more inclusive and gender-responsive leadership practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Educational Qualifications and Women's Leadership

Given that women's access to leadership positions in higher education is tied to their academic qualifications, academic performance and competence in research and in administrative work are the main criteria for selection. While women have made inroads into higher education qualifications, they are under-represented in higher positions at universities. Women's leadership aspirations are additionally influenced by their self-esteem and self-confidence, which in turn is influenced by their educational experiences; education boosts self-confidence, independence and capability to aspire to leadership, even in the face of gender stereotypes (Wroblewski, 2019). The other factor that has a significant impact on leadership

promotion is professional experience. Women are faced with a variety of challenges, including slow promotions, few opportunities for PhD study, poor research productivity, limited opportunities for advancement to the highest levels in academic and administrative careers, and restrictions in institutional environments. Although appointment systems are supposed to prioritize merit, qualifications and experience, they are often determined by political goals, favoritism, structures of power in institutions, and informal networks which limit women's chances of being appointed to leadership positions despite their meeting the formal requirements (Pourquoi & Comment, 2024).

Socio-cultural factors are still very relevant to the participation of women as leaders. Leadership is still considered a male domain and women still have primary responsibility for domestic and caregiving roles in the society, in line with patriarchal beliefs and gender stereotypes. Such attitudes have a negative impact on women's credibility as leaders and lead to their under-representation in academic governance. While leaders from diverse gender roles have been shown to have a positive impact on institutional effectiveness, women remain relatively scarce in top leadership and research roles world-wide (Mahlangu, 2022). Literature reviewed shows that the factors influencing women's higher education leadership are related, being educational, psychological, professional, institutional, socio-cultural and family related. Although educational attainment for women has increased and there are supportive laws in place, women still lack opportunities for reaching senior leadership roles, especially in developing and conflict-affected areas like North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo due to ongoing patriarchal norms, discriminatory organizational practices, political interference, and unequal domestic responsibilities.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The dependent variable (Women Involvement in Leadership) of higher institutions of the Butembo and Beni sub-conferences depends on several factors. It depends on the level of education, political factors, leadership styles, criteria for appointing leaders and social cultures as the independent variables.

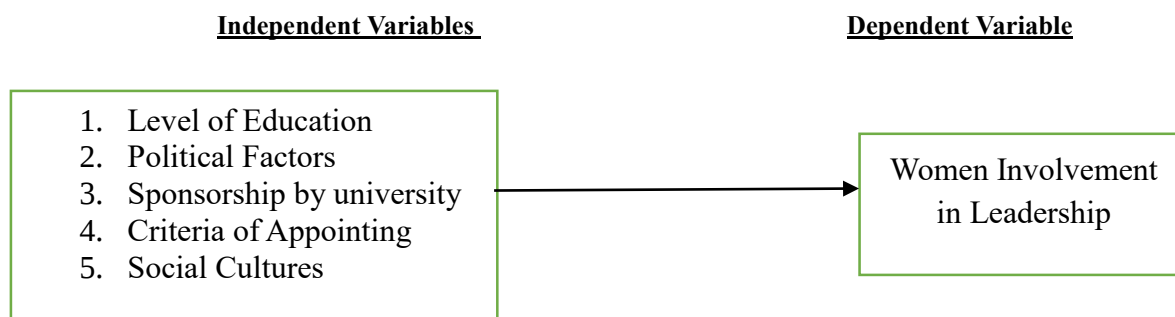


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 above shows the conceptual framework of this study. The five independent variables (level of education, political factors, scholarship by university, criteria for appointing leaders and social cultures) 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 implementation of these socio-political factors. The researcher asked the following research questions:

1. What is the level of women's involvement in university leadership in North Kivu Province (DRC) in terms of government-owned and church-owned universities?
2. What is the influence of socio-political factors on women involvement in leadership in North Kivu Province (DRC) in terms of government-owned and church-owned universities?
3. Is there a significant difference in the influence of socio-political factors on women involvement in leadership in North Kivu Province (DRC) in terms of government-owned and church-owned universities?

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. Results and Discussion

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

Table 1: Status of Women Involvement in University Leadership

		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

The findings of this study yielded a mean of 2.526 and a standard deviation of 0.851 for church-owned universities, as compared to 2.442 and 0.871 for government-owned universities. Based on the mean scale interpretation for this study, the findings indicate that, for church-owned universities, respondents reported a good representation of women in leadership (2.50 – 3.49 good representation),

whereas in government-owned universities, respondents reported a fair representation (1.50 – 2.49 fair representation). 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 favourable perception of women's leadership

involvement in 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. In contrast, 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.

4.2 Factors Influencing Women Involvement in University Leadership in North Kivu Province, DRC

4.2.1 Level of Education

Table 2: Level of Education

Descriptive Statistics				
Institution		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Government owned	The appointment of a woman for a leadership responsibility in my university depends on her scientific qualification.	84	3.37	.818
	Women in leadership are appointed in terms of their experience in my university.	83	2.98	.765
	In my university, appointment of women in leadership depends on her self-esteem.	82	2.67	.890
	In my university, women are engaged in leadership because they are passionate for service; they adapt and increase their ability.	83	2.67	.783
	Women lack sufficient qualities to occupy decision making responsibility in my university.	84	1.83	1.343
	Average	83	2.704	0.920
Church owned	The appointment of a woman for a leadership responsibility in my university depends on her scientific qualification.	31	3.32	.748
	Women in leadership are appointed in terms of their experience in my university.	30	3.23	.898
	In my university, appointment of women in leadership depends on her self-esteem.	29	2.69	.967
	In my university, women are engaged in leadership because they are passionate for service; they adapt and increase their ability.	30	3.13	.730
	Women lack sufficient qualities to occupy decision making responsibility in my university.	30	1.90	.759
	Average	30	2.854	0.820

The findings suggest that educational qualifications, experience, self-esteem, and passion for service are important determinants of women's involvement in

university leadership in both government-owned and church-owned universities in North Kivu Province. The slightly higher overall mean in church-owned universities

indicates that these factors may be more strongly emphasized in church-owned institutions than in government-owned universities. Furthermore, respondents across both university categories generally rejected the perception that women lack the qualities necessary for leadership positions. The findings suggest that respondents consider educational qualifications to be a highly influential factor in determining women’s participation in university leadership. In particular, possessing advanced academic credentials such as master’s or doctoral degrees is viewed as essential for women seeking leadership roles in higher education institutions.

This view aligns with current scholarship highlighting the crucial role of education in leadership advancement. For example, Diab et al. (2024) found that women across African universities often cited their academic qualifications and perceived competence as key to earning credibility and leadership opportunities. Similarly, Correa (2025) reported that despite strides toward gender balance in student enrolment globally, women remain

underrepresented in top academic positions, often due to limited access to higher-level qualifications and leadership training resources. The moderately low standard deviation (0.903) indicates a reasonable level of consensus among respondents, strengthening the idea that educational attainment is broadly recognized as a gateway to leadership roles. However, it also prompts important reflections on whether women without advanced degrees are inadvertently being excluded from leadership pathways and whether institutions are actively supporting their academic progression. Overall, this finding reinforces the importance of academic credentials in leadership development and underscores the need for policies that expand women’s access to postgraduate education, mentorship, and professional development opportunities, critical steps toward greater gender equity in university leadership.

4.2.2 Political Factors

Table 3: Political Factors
Descriptive Statistics

Institution		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Government owned	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions depends from knowledge with the Leaders (tribes, relative).	84	2.13	1.015
	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions isn't matter of political matters by is related to country enrollment Laws of employees.	83	2.58	.871
	Women are appointed in to leadership positions when they support the current leader in my university.	83	2.29	.944
	In my university, appointment of women in to leadership positions if effective when a woman is a member of a political party.	83	2.30	1.033
	The appointment of women in to leadership positions is depended on membership of the church in my university.	82	2.04	.949
	Average	83	2.268	0.962
Church owned	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions depends from knowledge with the Leaders (tribes, relative).	30	1.67	.922
	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions isn't matter of political matters by is related to country enrollment Laws of employees.	30	2.70	.988
	Women are appointed in to leadership positions when they support the current leader in my university.	30	2.27	.944
	In my university, appointment of women in to leadership positions if effective when a woman is a member of a political party.	31	1.94	.929
	The appointment of women in to leadership positions is depended on membership of the church in my university.	31	2.16	.898
	Average	30	2.148	0.936

The findings indicate that political factors have only a slight influence on women involvement in leadership in both government-owned and church-owned universities in North Kivu Province. Respondents in both categories of institutions generally perceived legal and institutional

employment regulations as more influential than political affiliations, tribal relationships, party membership, or church connections. The slightly lower overall mean in church-owned universities further suggests that political

considerations may be less influential in church-owned institutions compared to government-owned universities.

O'Connor and Irvine (2021) similarly note that informal political alliances and gendered power structures within academic institutions often shape leadership appointments, sometimes to the detriment of women. Additionally, Kelemen et al., (2023) highlight that political environments that actively support gender equality are associated with increased female representation in academic leadership, whereas unsupportive contexts tend to reinforce disparities. Madsen et al. (2022) further contend that political advocacy and gender-focused policy reforms are

crucial for breaking down systemic barriers in higher education leadership. The moderate standard deviation of 0.96 reflects some variation in how political factors are perceived, likely due to differences across institutional or regional contexts. Nonetheless, the findings underscore the importance of establishing leadership selection processes that are transparent, based on merit, and free from political interference and gender bias to promote inclusivity and equity in university leadership.

4.2.3 Sponsorship of the University

**Table 4: Sponsorship of the University
Descriptive Statistics**

Institution		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Government owned	In my university, the enrollment of women in the leadership is more objective in government -sponsored or church- sponsored	82	2.68	.941
	In my university, the criteria chosen for the appointment of women in church-sponsored are subjective.	79	2.91	2.487
	In my university, the appointment of women in government -sponsored is in accordance with the educational country's framework law (without any discrimination).	84	2.83	1.051
	In my university, the appointment of women to leadership positions in government -sponsored institutions does not promote women.	83	2.34	.901
	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions in church sponsored is based on the philosophy of every denomination	81	3.14	.919
	Average	82	2.78	1.260
Church owned	In my university, the enrollment of women in the leadership is more objective in government -sponsored or church- sponsored	29	1.97	.778
	In my university, the criteria chosen for the appointment of women in church-sponsored are subjective.	30	2.27	.868
	In my university, the appointment of women in government -sponsored is in accordance with the educational country's framework law (without any discrimination).	28	2.68	1.020
	In my university, the appointment of women to leadership positions in government -sponsored institutions does not promote women.	28	2.07	.858
	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions in church sponsored is based on the philosophy of every denomination	31	3.23	.762
	Average	29	2.444	0.857

The findings indicate that university sponsorship influences women's involvement in leadership differently across government-owned and church-owned universities. Government-owned university respondents perceived sponsorship as a more influential factor compared to respondents from church-owned universities. In both categories of institutions, respondents strongly agreed that denominational philosophy plays a major role in leadership appointments within church-sponsored universities. Additionally, the findings suggest that government-sponsored universities are generally viewed as operating within formal educational laws and frameworks that support non-discriminatory appointment practice.

The study suggests that university sponsorship is a highly influential factor in shaping women's participation in university leadership, reflecting its perceived importance in promoting or limiting access to leadership roles. Groysberg and Connolly (2021) emphasize the influence of university sponsorship on organizational culture and interpersonal relations, even though broader institutional norms and gendered power dynamics often play a more dominant role in shaping leadership pathways. Bissessar (2022) further supports this view, noting that while women often favour collaborative and participative leadership methods, their effectiveness can be constrained by rigid organizational frameworks and longstanding institutional

traditions. This aligns with the current study's indication that management style, although influential, may operate as just one component within a broader web of political, cultural, and structural elements. The findings point to the need for targeted leadership development programs that promote inclusive management practices, while also

recognizing the importance of addressing deeper systemic barriers to achieve genuine gender equity in university leadership.

4.2.4 Criteria for Appointing University Leadership

Table 5: Criteria for Appointing University Leadership

Descriptive Statistics				
Institution		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Government owned	The appointment of women in to leadership positions is based to the quota in my university.	84	2.50	1.024
	The appointment of women in to leadership positions depends on their skills in my university.	84	2.50	.871
	The appointment of women in to leadership positions is motivated by their experiences in my university.	84	3.06	.869
	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions is motivated by the qualification	84	3.11	.892
	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions isn't matter of those elements above, but it is more subjective.	84	2.67	.961
	Average	84	2.768	0.923
Church owned	The appointment of women in to leadership positions is based to the quota in my university.	31	2.06	.772
	The appointment of women in to leadership positions depends on their skills in my university.	31	2.39	.882
	The appointment of women in to leadership positions is motivated by their experiences in my university.	31	3.29	.739
	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions is motivated by the qualification	31	3.29	.643
	In my university, the appointment of women in to leadership positions isn't matter of those elements above, but it is more subjective.	29	2.90	.724
	Average	31	2.786	0.752

The findings suggest that qualifications and experience are the most influential criteria for appointing women into leadership positions in both government-owned and church-owned universities in North Kivu Province. Church-owned universities recorded slightly higher overall mean scores than government-owned universities, implying a somewhat stronger emphasis on formal qualifications and experience. The findings further indicate that while some respondents perceive appointment procedures as subjective, merit-based factors such as qualifications and experience remain the dominant considerations in women's leadership appointments.

This aligns with existing scholarship, such as Morley (2020) and Williams & Dempsey (2021), which highlights how leadership appointment practices, often based on formal credentials, experience, and informal networks, can act as barriers when shaped by gender-biased norms. Traditional benchmarks that align more closely with male-dominated career trajectories may unintentionally disadvantage women. The present paper presents the context-based findings from universities in North Kivu

Province, DRC. The results show that, in this matter, the qualifications and experience of women are the most influential determinants of appointing leaders, compared to quotas, skills, and subjective factors, which are less dominant. This implies that, unlike in other settings, formal meritocracy, rather than gender-based quotas or informal favoritism, is now the primary driver of women's leadership in these institutions. The study's standard deviation of 0.886 indicates a moderate spread in views, suggesting some variability in institutional or cultural approaches to leadership selection. While certain universities may adopt fair and transparent criteria, others may lean on opaque, politicized, or biased processes. Furthermore, scholars like Morley and Williams & Dempsey advocate for appointment frameworks that consider non-linear career paths, flexible work arrangements, and diverse leadership styles, attributes often associated with women. The study, therefore, highlights the urgent need to reform selection processes to be more inclusive and reflective of diverse leadership potential (Williams & Dempsey, 2018).

4.2.5 Social Cultures

Table 6: Social Cultures
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	0.871
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	0.851

The findings suggest that social cultural factors have a moderate influence on women involvement in leadership in universities within North Kivu Province. Church-owned universities recorded a slightly higher overall mean score than government-owned universities, indicating that social cultural factors may be more influential in church-owned institutions. In both categories of universities, respondents generally agreed that men and women have equal leadership opportunities. However, issues such as gender roles, family responsibilities, and stereotypes were perceived to have only slight influence on women's involvement in leadership positions. The study indicates that socio-cultural factors play a modest role in shaping women's involvement in university leadership. This suggests that while social culture is perceived to influence leadership opportunities for women, it is not seen as the primary or most significant barrier.

Socio-cultural elements such as societal norms, values, traditions, and expectations regarding gender roles do impact leadership participation to a certain extent. However, the variability reflected by the standard deviation

suggests that this influence differs among individuals or contexts. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which acknowledges that socio-cultural norms can either hinder or encourage women's leadership trajectories. For instance, Ely and Meyerson, (2000) argue that gender expectations subtly shape organizational cultures, often creating hidden biases that women must overcome. Likewise, Charlesworth and Banaji, (2021) observe that in some academic settings, shifting cultural attitudes are helping to weaken long-standing gender stereotypes. While reshaping social norms remains important, the findings underscore the need for parallel institutional reforms to foster a genuinely inclusive leadership environment in higher education.

4.3 Difference in Factors Influencing Women Involvement in University Leadership Between Government-owned and Church-owned Universities in North Kivu Province, DRC

Table 6: Difference in Women Involvement in University Leadership between Government-owned and Church-owned universities in North Kivu Province, DRC

		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
Level of Education	Equal variances assumed	1.077	.302	-1.310	108	.193	-.64266	.49048	-1.61486	.32955
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.246	45.227	.219	-.64266	.51594	-1.68167	.39636
Political Factors	Equal variances assumed	.059	.809	1.533	107	.128	.69316	.45214	-.20315	1.58948
	Equal variances not assumed			1.555	53.899	.126	.69316	.44582	-.20068	1.58701
Management Styles	Equal variances assumed	.206	.651	2.654	102	.009	1.68995	.63678	.42690	2.95300
	Equal variances not assumed			3.170	66.799	.002	1.68995	.53303	.62595	2.75394
Criteria for Appointment	Equal variances assumed	.948	.332	.266	111	.791	.12069	.45436	-.77965	1.02103
	Equal variances not assumed			.290	57.765	.773	.12069	.41634	-.71278	.95416
Cultural Factors	Equal variances assumed	.442	.508	-.943	111	.348	-.47068	.49917	-1.45983	.51846
	Equal variances not assumed			-.999	57.585	.322	-.47068	.47132	-1.41428	.47292

The p-value for level of education was 0.193, indicating no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between government and church-owned universities in how educational qualifications affect women's leadership participation. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between government and church owned universities in how educational qualifications affect women's leadership participation was retained and the alternate hypothesis was rejected. The implication of this finding is that the level of education alone may not be the determining factor influencing women's participation in leadership positions within universities. This means that even when the women attain the highest educational qualification, other factors might be at play. O'Neil and Bilimoria, (2015) also argued that it is not only education that guarantee women's advancement into leadership but other factors are at play such as organizational culture, gender norms, and opportunity structures are more influential. In addition, Morley, (2013) also established that in higher education institutions across Africa, women with higher education still face institutional barriers of gender and lack of mentorship.

Similarly, political factors yielded a p-value of 0.128, also not statistically significant, suggesting that political factors are perceived comparably across both institutional types. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between government and church owned universities in how political factors affect women's leadership participation was retained. The finding of this study indicates that political factors equally influential on the women's opportunities for leadership across both institutional types. Morley, (2013) established that women's leadership in African universities is constrained by politicized appointment systems, which reinforce male dominance in management structures across both public and private. In addition, Onsongo, (2016) also observed that political patronage and institutional politics are common barriers to women's advancement in both public and church-affiliated institutions.

In contrast, management styles produced a p-value of 0.009, which is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), pointing to a meaningful difference between the two types of institutions. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference between government and church

owned universities in how management styles affect women's leadership participation was retained. This implies that the way leadership is structured and exercised such as levels of inclusivity and participation may differ in ways that influence women's leadership opportunities. Church-owned institutions, in particular, may foster more supportive environments for women leaders through their management practices. Airini et al., (2021) emphasize that management support, leadership style, and organizational climate strongly influence women's capacity to rise into leadership roles in academia. In addition, Morley (2013) still argue that the structure of management of institutions shape access to leadership, noting that faith-based institutions often combine merit-based systems with gendered moral expectations that may disadvantage women.

No significant differences were observed in criteria for appointment ($p = 0.791$). Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between government and church owned universities in how criteria for appointment affect women's leadership participation was retained. The finding of this study indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between government and church-owned universities regarding how criteria for appointment affect women's leadership participation. This implies that both government and church-owned universities may have similar formal requirements but formal criteria only is not a guarantee for equal opportunities for women. Morley, (2014) established that even when policies for appointment are fair and are based on merit, gender inequalities persist because institutional cultures and power relations subtly have an influence on who gets selected for a leadership position. In addition, Chavatzia, (2017) also highlighted that equal qualification or appointment standards only is not able to eliminate gender disparities unless accompanied by systemic efforts to transform institutional cultures.

Lastly, cultural factors ($p = 0.348$), suggesting that both types of universities share similar institutional norms and appointment procedures that affect women's access to leadership roles. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference between government and church owned universities in how cultural factors affect women's leadership participation was retained. The lack of significant variation in these areas likely reflects broader structural and cultural influences that extend beyond the boundaries of institutional ownership. Therefore, meaningful change must go beyond institutional policies and instead address cultural transformation. These findings are consistent with existing literature that highlights the complex interplay between institutional ethos and broader societal frameworks. For instance, Naitore, (2022), reported that while church institutions increasingly embrace women in leadership, their

participation remains limited in strategic roles, revealing that inclusive management alone may not dismantle all existing barriers. Likewise, Bwire, (2020) observed that efforts by church institutions in Africa to integrate women into leadership structures are ongoing, yet uneven and often influenced by internal administrative frameworks.

In conclusion, the significant difference in management styles highlights the critical role of institutional leadership culture in shaping women's leadership experiences. However, the absence of significant differences in other factors such as education level, political dynamics, appointment practices, and cultural influences suggests that advancing gender equity in university leadership will require systemic reforms that go beyond institutional type.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

According to the results of the presented study, it is possible to make several crucial conclusions as to the participation of women in the leadership of universities in North Kivu Province, DRC:

The determining factor is not institutional ownership: Although there was a slightly better representation of women in leadership in the church-owned universities, the differences between church- and government-owned institutions were not statistically significant. This implies that ownership is not one of the determinants of women's participation in leadership, and that more structural, policy, and cultural factors are more influential. Academic qualifications and work experience also play a major role: women's proven competencies and educational background are the major factors that affect their involvement in leading positions. This illustrates the significance of merit-based standards and capacity-building programs, suggesting that women's skills development and the ability to gain professional experience can be effective ways to improve women's representation in leadership.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were established:

1. Opportunities are created by appointment criteria: appointment processes that emphasize qualifications, experience, and demonstrated competence are essential to allow women to become leaders. Nevertheless, there is still an element of subjectivity in appointments, which underscores the need for clear, uniform processes

to minimize bias and ensure equal opportunities for leadership positions.

2. Cultural and leadership practices are important: the research revealed differences in the application or even perception of leadership styles across institutions, suggesting that the application of transformational and empowerment-based management practices can increase the engagement and visibility of women in leadership roles. The establishment of inclusive, participatory, and supportive leadership cultures is thus crucial to enhancing the representation.
3. Systemic barriers have to be addressed through specific interventions: Socio-cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and bureaucratic limitations, though less powerful than qualifications and appointment criteria, also influence women's opportunities in leadership. These obstacles should be overcome through mentorship programs, scholarships, policy implementation, and gender-sensitive initiatives to establish sustainable ways for women to further advance.
4. It is also important to integrate policy and practice: Church-owned universities benefit from internal policies and principles that actively promote gender equality. The replication of such strategies in government-owned institutions through inclusive policies, capacity building, and accountability mechanisms can create a more equal environment in which women can take up leadership positions across all universities.
5. The regression analysis indicates that level of education, appointment criteria, and cultural factors are the major factors that influence women's participation in university leadership. These results support the significance of empowerment and meritocracy, as well as the socio-cultural change, to higher gender equity in leadership, and indicate that political and sponsorship factors might be indirect or direct.

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