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FEMINISM AND LIBRARIANSHIP: ADDRESSING GENDER EQUITY IN LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The pursuit of gender equity in leadership remains a significant concern within the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession in Nigeria. Although librarianship is widely regarded as a female-dominated profession, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions due to persistent sociocultural norms, patriarchal structures, institutional barriers, and gender stereotypes. This paper examines the role of feminism in promoting gender equity in leadership within the Nigerian LIS profession through a critical review of existing literature. A narrative literature review was adopted to synthesis scholarly publications on feminism, gender equity, women's leadership, and librarianship. The review identifies key factors contributing to leadership disparities, including discriminatory organizational practices, unequal access to leadership opportunities, limited mentorship, work–life balance challenges, and entrenched gender bias. It further explores the implications of these barriers for the profession and considers the future of women in librarianship, with particular emphasis on leadership and administrative roles. The findings indicate that feminist perspectives provide a valuable framework for advancing institutional reforms, leadership development, mentorship, and gender-responsive policies that promote equitable representation. The paper concludes that achieving sustainable gender equity in leadership requires dismantling structural and cultural barriers through coordinated efforts involving educational institutions, library management, professional associations, and policymakers. It recommends the implementation of gender-responsive policies, inclusive leadership development programmes, and institutional reforms to strengthen women's participation in leadership and foster a more equitable and inclusive Library and Information Science profession in Nigeria.

Keywords: Feminism, gender equity, leadership, women librarians, Library and Information Science, Nigeria.

Introduction

Gender equity in leadership has become a central issue in contemporary discussions on sustainable development, organisational effectiveness, and social justice. Although significant progress has been made globally in expanding women's access to education, employment, and professional development, women continue to experience disproportionate barriers to leadership and decision-making positions across many professions. These disparities persist despite growing recognition that inclusive leadership enhances organisational performance, innovation, and institutional responsiveness. Consequently, achieving equitable representation in leadership is increasingly regarded not only as a matter of social justice but also as a prerequisite for effective governance and professional advancement. The Library and Information Science (LIS) profession reflects this broader global challenge. While women constitute the majority of professionals within the field, their numerical dominance has not translated into equitable representation in leadership and administrative positions, where men continue to occupy a disproportionate share of decision-making roles.

Evidence from the library profession illustrates this paradox. According to a 2025 fact sheet published by the Department for Professional Employees, women account for 82.5% of enrolment in graduate library science programmes, 89.2% of all librarians, and 84.2% of library assistants. In practical terms, approximately four out of every five librarians are women. Nevertheless, numerical dominance has historically failed to translate into equality in leadership, remuneration, and career progression (ALA_Womenhistory, 2026). The American Library Association (ALA, 2026) reports that among academic librarians, disparities persist in both median salary and leadership representation between male and female librarians, even where educational attainment is comparable. These findings suggest that gender inequality within librarianship is not primarily a question of participation but of access to influence, authority, and organisational leadership. Women continue to encounter structural and institutional barriers that constrain their progression into senior management positions despite possessing qualifications comparable to, and in many cases exceeding, those of their male counterparts. Enyiukwu (2020) attributes this persistent imbalance to what is described as "male jeopardization," a socio-cultural belief that women should remain subordinate to men in virtually every sphere of life. Such patriarchal assumptions continue to reinforce gendered perceptions of leadership and limit women's opportunities for career advancement.

The Nigerian experience reflects these broader patterns of gender inequality. Nigeria remains deeply rooted in patriarchal social structures that have historically privileged male leadership while limiting women's participation in political, administrative, and professional decision-making (Ikonne & Isaac, 2023). This historical legacy continues to shape contemporary leadership opportunities across public and private institutions. The National Democratic Institute (2019) reports that women occupied only 4.8% of elective political offices following the 2019 general elections, while the International Republican Institute (IRI, 2018) observes that women are frequently perceived as less electable, resulting in reduced access to political nominations and leadership opportunities. According to Ikonne and Isaac (2023), these disparities are reinforced by cultural expectations that associate women with domestic responsibilities while assigning leadership, authority, and decision-making roles to men. Such stereotypes extend beyond politics

and permeate professional environments, influencing recruitment, promotion, leadership selection, and organisational culture.

The Library and Information Science profession in Nigeria is not immune to these societal influences. Although women constitute a substantial proportion of the professional workforce, leadership opportunities remain unevenly distributed. Adamu et al. (2023) found evidence of gender disparities in the provision of library and information services among academic librarians at Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida Library, Federal University of Technology, Minna, and Abubakar Gimba Library, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, with the disparities favouring male academic librarians. Earlier, Felaye (2004) described librarianship in Nigeria as largely a "He" profession, arguing that leadership and decision-making positions have historically been dominated by men despite the increasing participation of women in the profession. Similar observations have been reported beyond Nigeria. Iglesias (2023) found that men employed within the predominantly female library profession often secure employment more rapidly and are more likely to attain administrative and managerial positions. Consequently, they benefit from greater opportunities for promotion, higher remuneration, and accelerated career progression. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that gender inequality in librarianship extends beyond workforce composition to encompass unequal access to leadership, organisational influence, and professional recognition.

Cultural constructions of leadership further reinforce these inequalities. Olufunke, cited in Ikonne and Isaac (2023), argues that Nigerian society traditionally associates leadership with masculine characteristics such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and dominance. These perceptions perpetuate the belief that leadership is inherently a male responsibility and consequently diminish recognition of women's leadership potential irrespective of their competence and professional achievements. However, empirical evidence suggests that when women are provided with equitable opportunities, institutional support, mentorship, and enabling organisational environments, they demonstrate leadership effectiveness comparable to that of men across both public and private sectors (Udom et al., 2019). Expanding women's participation in leadership within the Library and Information Science profession is therefore not simply a matter of achieving numerical representation. Rather, it is fundamental to ensuring that the profession fully benefits from the knowledge, experience, and leadership capacity of its largest professional constituency.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to gender inequality and women's leadership across different professions, relatively little attention has been devoted to examining these issues through the lens of feminist theory within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession. Existing studies have largely documented gender disparities, barriers to advancement, and women's participation in librarianship, yet comparatively few have synthesised feminist perspectives as a conceptual framework for understanding leadership inequities or for informing institutional reforms and organisational practice. This gap limits both theoretical understanding and practical efforts to promote inclusive leadership within Nigerian librarianship.

Against this background, this paper critically examines the role of feminism in advancing gender equity in leadership within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession. Drawing on existing scholarship, it synthesises evidence on the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that constrain women's leadership advancement and explores how feminist perspectives can inform leadership development, organisational reform, and gender-responsive professional practice. By integrating feminist thought with contemporary debates on leadership in librarianship, the paper

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contributes to a deeper conceptual understanding of gender equity while proposing practical strategies for strengthening inclusive leadership within libraries, professional associations, and the broader Library and Information Science profession in Nigeria.

Feminism

Feminism has evolved from a movement advocating women's rights into a broad intellectual and social framework for understanding and addressing gender inequalities across political, economic, cultural, and professional spheres. Although the concept has been interpreted from diverse ideological and philosophical perspectives, scholars generally agree that feminism is fundamentally concerned with promoting equality between men and women by challenging the structures and practices that perpetuate discrimination and unequal opportunities (Moon, 2025). Consequently, feminism has become one of the most influential perspectives for examining gender relations, women's empowerment, and equitable participation in leadership and decision-making.

The concept has undergone considerable evolution over time. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines feminism as the state of being feminine or womanly, while *Webster's Dictionary* describes it as the principle that women should enjoy political rights equal to those of men. The term is derived from the Latin word *femina*, meaning *woman*, and was originally associated with movements advocating equality and women's rights. Contemporary scholarship, however, extends the concept beyond legal and political rights to encompass equal access to education, employment, leadership, governance, and decision-making. Thus, feminism is widely recognised as both an intellectual tradition and a social movement committed to eliminating gender-based inequalities and promoting equal opportunities for women and men in every sphere of society.

Despite differences in emphasis, the literature demonstrates considerable convergence regarding the objectives of feminism. Raina (2017) conceptualises feminism as a broad collection of political movements, ideologies, and social movements united by the common objective of achieving political, economic, personal, and social equality between the sexes. According to the author, feminism seeks to create opportunities that enable women to enjoy equitable access to resources and opportunities that have historically been more readily available to men. Similarly, Rokade (2022) views feminism as both a movement and a conceptual ideology aimed at improving the status of women through the attainment of equal rights and opportunities. The author further argues that feminism promotes a social order in which women are recognised as equally valuable and capable participants in every sphere of human endeavour. More recently, Moon (2025) describes feminism as a movement that advocates the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes while emphasising that its contemporary focus extends beyond legal equality to include equitable participation in leadership, governance, employment, and organisational decision-making.

These perspectives collectively demonstrate that feminism is not merely an advocacy movement for women's rights but also an analytical framework for examining the institutional, cultural, and structural factors that sustain gender inequality. Rather than seeking preferential treatment for women, feminism advocates fairness by challenging patriarchal systems, discriminatory organisational practices, and gender stereotypes that restrict women's participation in leadership and public life. Contemporary feminist scholarship therefore places considerable emphasis on dismantling structural barriers, transforming institutional cultures, and creating environments in

which leadership opportunities are determined by competence, merit, and professional capability rather than gender.

Within the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession, feminism provides a particularly relevant conceptual lens for examining the disparity between women's numerical dominance and their comparatively limited representation in leadership positions. Although women constitute the majority of professionals within the discipline, leadership and administrative positions continue to be disproportionately occupied by men. This imbalance suggests that increasing women's participation in the profession alone is insufficient to achieve genuine leadership equity. Instead, greater attention must be directed towards understanding the institutional, organisational, and socio-cultural factors that shape leadership opportunities and career progression.

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts feminism not merely as a movement for women's rights but as an analytical framework for examining gender inequities in leadership within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession. By providing insights into how institutional practices, organisational cultures, patriarchal norms, and gender stereotypes influence women's access to leadership positions, feminism offers a useful perspective for understanding existing disparities and identifying pathways towards more inclusive and equitable leadership within the profession.

Gender Equity

Gender equity has emerged as a central principle in contemporary discussions on human rights, sustainable development, and inclusive governance. Although the terms *gender equity* and *gender equality* are often used interchangeably, they represent distinct but complementary concepts. Gender equality refers to the equal enjoyment of rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and treatment by women and men irrespective of sex, whereas gender equity emphasises fairness in the distribution of opportunities, resources, and benefits by recognising that historical, social, and structural disadvantages may require different approaches to achieve comparable outcomes. Consequently, gender equity seeks to remove barriers that have historically limited women's access to education, employment, leadership, and decision-making while ensuring that both women and men can realise their full potential.

Within leadership discourse, gender equity extends beyond numerical representation to encompass equitable access to leadership opportunities, career progression, organisational resources, remuneration, mentorship, and participation in institutional decision-making. Achieving gender equity therefore requires addressing the structural and cultural factors that perpetuate discrimination rather than merely increasing the number of women within an organisation. It recognises that equal representation alone cannot eliminate disparities if institutional policies, organisational cultures, and societal norms continue to privilege one gender over another.

The literature consistently identifies gender equity as an essential determinant of organisational effectiveness and democratic governance. Organisations that promote equitable leadership opportunities benefit from broader perspectives, improved decision-making, greater innovation, and enhanced institutional legitimacy. Conversely, unequal access to leadership positions limits organisational performance by excluding qualified individuals from positions where they can contribute meaningfully to policy formulation, strategic planning, and institutional development.

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Gender equity is therefore increasingly recognised as both a social justice imperative and a strategic organisational objective.

Despite substantial improvements in women's educational attainment and professional participation, significant disparities persist in leadership across many sectors. Women continue to encounter barriers arising from patriarchal organisational cultures, discriminatory recruitment and promotion practices, unequal access to mentoring and professional networks, work–life balance challenges, and persistent gender stereotypes regarding leadership capability. These barriers frequently operate simultaneously, creating structural disadvantages that restrict women's progression into senior leadership positions despite possessing qualifications and competencies comparable to those of their male counterparts.

Within the Library and Information Science profession, the pursuit of gender equity presents a particularly compelling paradox. Women constitute the overwhelming majority of the professional workforce, yet they remain disproportionately underrepresented in senior administrative and leadership positions. This imbalance demonstrates that numerical dominance does not necessarily translate into equitable participation in organisational leadership. Instead, access to leadership continues to be shaped by institutional practices, organisational cultures, and societal perceptions regarding gender and authority. As a result, many qualified women experience slower career progression, reduced visibility within institutional governance, and fewer opportunities to influence strategic decision-making despite their substantial contributions to the profession.

The Nigerian Library and Information Science profession reflects these broader patterns of inequality. Although women have increasingly distinguished themselves through academic achievement, professional competence, research productivity, and service delivery, their advancement into senior leadership positions has not kept pace with their numerical representation within the profession. Persistent socio-cultural expectations, patriarchal institutional structures, and gendered assumptions regarding leadership continue to influence recruitment, promotion, and administrative appointments. Consequently, promoting gender equity within Nigerian librarianship requires more than increasing women's participation in the profession. It demands institutional reforms that ensure leadership opportunities are determined by competence, experience, and merit rather than gender.

Viewed from this perspective, gender equity provides an important conceptual foundation for examining leadership disparities within the Library and Information Science profession. It shifts attention from simply documenting the underrepresentation of women to critically examining the structural and institutional processes through which leadership opportunities are created, allocated, and sustained. Such an approach is essential for understanding the persistence of gender disparities within a profession where women constitute the majority of practitioners yet continue to face significant obstacles to attaining positions of authority and influence.

Leadership in the Library and Information Science Profession

Leadership is widely recognised as a critical determinant of organisational effectiveness, institutional sustainability, and professional development. Within the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession, leadership extends beyond the routine administration of libraries to

encompass strategic planning, policy formulation, innovation, human resource development, advocacy, and the effective management of information services. As libraries continue to evolve in response to technological advancement, changing user expectations, and the expanding information landscape, effective leadership has become indispensable for ensuring institutional relevance, professional excellence, and quality service delivery.

The responsibilities of library leaders have expanded considerably beyond the traditional custodianship of information resources. Contemporary library leaders are expected to provide strategic direction, facilitate organisational change, promote staff development, strengthen professional collaboration, mobilise resources, and create environments that encourage innovation and continuous learning. They are also responsible for ensuring equitable access to information, supporting research and education, and responding proactively to emerging societal and technological challenges. Consequently, leadership within the Library and Information Science profession requires not only technical expertise but also strong administrative competence, interpersonal skills, ethical judgement, and the capacity to inspire and motivate others.

Despite the growing recognition of leadership as a cornerstone of effective library management, access to leadership positions has not always reflected the demographic composition of the profession. Although women constitute the overwhelming majority of library professionals, leadership within libraries and professional associations has historically remained disproportionately occupied by men. This imbalance suggests that progression into leadership positions is influenced by factors that extend beyond educational qualifications, professional competence, or years of experience. Instead, organisational culture, institutional practices, recruitment and promotion processes, and broader societal perceptions regarding gender frequently shape access to leadership opportunities.

Research has consistently demonstrated that leadership effectiveness is not determined by gender but by competence, experience, vision, and the ability to manage organisational resources effectively. Nevertheless, leadership continues to be socially constructed in many societies as a predominantly masculine attribute, resulting in unequal opportunities for women despite their demonstrated capabilities. Such perceptions contribute to the underrepresentation of women in senior administrative positions even within professions where they constitute the majority of practitioners. Consequently, the persistent leadership imbalance observed within librarianship reflects broader structural and institutional inequalities rather than differences in professional ability or leadership potential.

Within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession, leadership remains central to advancing professional standards, strengthening institutional governance, and enhancing the quality of library and information services. Effective leadership influences policy implementation, staff motivation, professional development, research productivity, resource mobilisation, and the adoption of innovative technologies. However, the continued underrepresentation of women in key leadership positions limits the diversity of perspectives available during institutional decision-making and constrains the profession's ability to fully utilise the expertise of its largest professional constituency.

Promoting inclusive leadership within librarianship therefore requires more than increasing the numerical participation of women in the profession. It demands transparent recruitment and

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promotion processes, equitable access to leadership development opportunities, effective mentorship, institutional accountability, and organisational cultures that recognise leadership as a function of competence rather than gender. Creating such an environment would not only strengthen gender equity but also enhance institutional effectiveness by ensuring that leadership positions are occupied by the most qualified individuals irrespective of sex. Consequently, understanding the factors that continue to shape leadership opportunities within the Library and Information Science profession remains essential for developing sustainable strategies that promote equity, professional growth, and organisational excellence.

Women's Marginalisation in Leadership within the Library and Information Science Profession

Despite constituting the majority of professionals within the Library and Information Science (LIS) workforce, women continue to experience marginalisation in leadership and administrative positions. This disparity represents one of the most enduring paradoxes in the profession, where numerical dominance has not translated into proportional representation in positions of authority and institutional decision-making. Existing scholarship suggests that this imbalance cannot be attributed to differences in educational attainment, professional competence, or commitment to the profession. Rather, it reflects the cumulative influence of socio-cultural norms, organisational practices, institutional barriers, and deeply entrenched gender stereotypes that continue to shape leadership opportunities.

A recurring theme in the literature is the influence of patriarchal social structures on women's career advancement. In many societies, including Nigeria, leadership has traditionally been associated with masculine attributes such as authority, assertiveness, and dominance, while women have been socially assigned domestic and caregiving responsibilities. These gendered expectations often shape organisational cultures and influence recruitment, promotion, and leadership succession processes, thereby limiting women's progression into senior administrative positions even where they possess the qualifications and experience required for such roles. Consequently, women are frequently required to demonstrate higher levels of competence than their male counterparts before being considered suitable for leadership appointments.

Institutional practices further reinforce these inequalities. Leadership selection processes that lack transparency, unequal access to professional development opportunities, limited mentorship, and inadequate representation of women in influential professional networks collectively reduce women's visibility within organisational leadership structures. Because leadership positions are often filled through informal networks, sponsorship, or institutional influence, women who are excluded from these circles experience fewer opportunities for advancement despite making substantial contributions to teaching, research, librarianship, and professional service. These structural barriers contribute to a leadership pipeline in which women remain underrepresented at senior levels despite forming the largest segment of the profession.

The literature also identifies work–life balance as a significant factor influencing women's leadership trajectories. The competing demands of professional responsibilities and socially prescribed family roles often create additional challenges for women pursuing leadership positions. While these responsibilities do not diminish women's leadership capabilities, they may affect career progression where institutions fail to provide supportive policies such as flexible work

arrangements, family-friendly organisational practices, and equitable promotion systems. Consequently, structural inequalities rather than individual limitations frequently explain the slower advancement of women into leadership positions.

Within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession, these challenges are compounded by broader societal perceptions regarding women's suitability for leadership. Although women have continued to excel academically and professionally, leadership opportunities have not expanded proportionately. This imbalance reflects a persistent disconnect between women's contributions to the profession and their representation in institutional governance, policy formulation, and strategic decision-making. The continued dominance of men in senior administrative positions therefore illustrates that leadership inequality within librarianship is not merely a demographic issue but a manifestation of wider institutional and cultural dynamics that privilege male leadership.

The consequences of women's marginalisation extend beyond the individuals directly affected. Organisations that fail to utilise the leadership potential of qualified women risk limiting diversity in decision-making, reducing organisational innovation, and weakening institutional responsiveness to the needs of both staff and users. Conversely, greater inclusion of women in leadership broadens perspectives, strengthens collaborative governance, enhances organisational effectiveness, and contributes to more equitable and representative institutional leadership. Promoting women's leadership should therefore be viewed not simply as an issue of fairness but as a strategic imperative for strengthening the Library and Information Science profession.

Addressing these inequalities requires coordinated institutional and professional interventions that extend beyond increasing women's numerical participation within the profession. Sustainable progress depends upon transparent leadership recruitment and promotion systems, structured mentorship programmes, leadership development initiatives, supportive organisational policies, and institutional cultures that recognise leadership on the basis of competence, integrity, experience, and professional achievement rather than gender. Such measures are essential for creating an inclusive leadership environment in which women can contribute fully to the advancement of the Library and Information Science profession in Nigeria.

Emerging themes from Literature Review

The literature reviewed demonstrates that gender inequity in leadership remains a persistent challenge despite decades of advocacy, policy reforms, and increasing participation of women in higher education and professional practice. Although feminism has significantly influenced scholarly discourse and institutional efforts aimed at promoting women's rights and leadership opportunities, evidence consistently indicates that women continue to encounter structural, organisational, and socio-cultural barriers that limit their advancement into positions of authority. These barriers extend beyond individual competence and qualifications to include patriarchal organisational cultures, gender stereotypes, discriminatory promotion practices, limited access to mentorship and professional networks, and persistent assumptions regarding women's leadership capabilities.

Within the Library and Information Science profession, the paradox is particularly striking. Women constitute the overwhelming majority of the professional workforce, yet leadership positions within libraries, academic institutions, and professional associations remain disproportionately occupied

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by men. The literature suggests that numerical representation alone is insufficient to achieve meaningful leadership equity where institutional structures and organisational cultures continue to reproduce historical patterns of exclusion. Consequently, increasing the number of women within the profession does not automatically translate into greater participation in strategic decision-making or administrative leadership.

The Nigerian context further illustrates the complex interaction between professional structures and broader societal norms. Existing studies consistently attribute women's underrepresentation in leadership to deeply entrenched patriarchal traditions, cultural expectations, institutional practices, and gender-role stereotypes that continue to influence recruitment, promotion, leadership succession, and organisational governance. These factors collectively create a leadership environment in which women often encounter greater obstacles to career progression despite possessing comparable qualifications, professional competence, and demonstrated leadership potential. The persistence of these challenges suggests that gender inequity within Nigerian librarianship reflects broader societal dynamics rather than isolated institutional practices.

The reviewed literature also highlights an important conceptual shift in contemporary scholarship. Rather than viewing gender inequity solely as an issue of representation, recent studies increasingly emphasise the need to examine the structural mechanisms through which leadership opportunities are created, distributed, and sustained. From this perspective, feminism provides a valuable analytical framework for understanding how institutional cultures, power relations, and gendered assumptions continue to shape leadership outcomes. It also offers practical insights for developing policies and interventions that promote inclusive leadership, institutional accountability, mentorship, and equitable career advancement.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on gender and leadership, important gaps remain within the Library and Information Science literature. Much of the existing research has focused on documenting disparities in representation or examining isolated barriers to women's advancement. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to critically synthesising feminist perspectives as a framework for understanding leadership inequities within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession. Similarly, there remains limited integration of evidence on how organisational structures, socio-cultural influences, and institutional practices collectively shape women's leadership experiences and opportunities.

This study addresses these gaps by undertaking a critical narrative review of the existing literature on feminism, gender equity, leadership, and librarianship. By synthesising diverse strands of scholarship, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing women's leadership within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession and identifies practical strategies for promoting more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable leadership practices. The following section outlines the methodological approach adopted in conducting the review.

Methods

This study adopted a narrative literature review design to critically examine the role of feminism in promoting gender equity in leadership within the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession in Nigeria. A narrative review was considered appropriate because it allows for the integration,

interpretation, and synthesis of evidence from diverse scholarly sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex social and organisational issues. Relevant literature was identified through electronic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Library and Information Science Source, and African Journals Online (AJOL). Additional sources were retrieved through reference list searches of relevant publications.

The review considered peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters, conference proceedings, policy documents, and reports published by recognised professional bodies and international organisations that addressed feminism, gender equity, women's leadership, and librarianship. Priority was given to studies relevant to the Nigerian context while drawing on international literature to provide broader conceptual and empirical perspectives. The retrieved literature was subjected to critical reading, comparison, and thematic synthesis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and knowledge gaps relating to women's leadership in the LIS profession. The findings from the reviewed literature were subsequently synthesised to provide evidence-based insights and recommendations for advancing gender-equitable leadership within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession.

Results

The thematic analysis of the reviewed literature revealed four interrelated themes that explain the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership within the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession despite their numerical dominance. These themes include persistent gender disparities in leadership representation, structural and socio-cultural barriers to leadership advancement, the relevance of feminist perspectives to leadership transformation, and institutional strategies for promoting gender-equitable leadership.

The review consistently demonstrates that numerical representation does not necessarily translate into equitable leadership representation. Although women constitute the majority of librarians globally, they remain disproportionately underrepresented in senior administrative and executive positions. Evidence from the American Library Association indicates that women account for the overwhelming majority of librarians, yet disparities persist in leadership appointments, salary progression, and career advancement, even among professionals with equivalent educational qualifications (American Library Association, 2026). Similar patterns have been reported across higher education and knowledge-based professions, where women continue to experience slower progression into executive leadership despite increasing participation in the workforce (UN Women, 2023). These findings suggest that representation alone is insufficient to eliminate leadership inequalities where institutional structures and organisational cultures continue to privilege traditional leadership pathways.

The literature further reveals that women's leadership opportunities are shaped by multiple structural and socio-cultural barriers operating simultaneously. Patriarchal organisational cultures, gender stereotypes, discriminatory promotion practices, inadequate mentoring opportunities, limited professional networks, and competing work-family responsibilities emerged as the most frequently reported obstacles to women's career progression. These barriers reinforce one another and collectively reduce women's visibility within leadership pipelines. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that leadership selection processes often favour characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, thereby reinforcing implicit biases regarding women's suitability for

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senior administrative responsibilities (International Labour Organization, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Consequently, women frequently encounter higher performance expectations than their male counterparts before receiving similar recognition or promotion opportunities.

Within the Nigerian context, the findings indicate that broader societal norms continue to influence leadership opportunities within the Library and Information Science profession. The literature consistently identifies patriarchal cultural expectations as significant constraints on women's advancement into leadership positions. Traditional perceptions that associate leadership with men while assigning women primary domestic responsibilities continue to influence recruitment, promotion, and leadership succession within many organisations (National Democratic Institute, 2019). These cultural expectations are further reinforced by institutional practices that inadequately address gender disparities in leadership development, succession planning, and organisational governance. As a result, women's substantial contributions to librarianship have not been matched by proportional representation within senior decision-making structures.

Another prominent finding emerging from the review is the increasing recognition of feminism as an analytical and practical framework for addressing leadership inequities. Rather than advocating preferential treatment, contemporary feminist scholarship emphasises dismantling structural barriers that constrain women's participation in leadership while promoting institutional environments founded on fairness, inclusion, and equal opportunity (UN Women, 2023). Across the reviewed literature, feminist perspectives consistently advocate transparent recruitment processes, equitable promotion systems, structured mentorship programmes, leadership development initiatives, and organisational accountability as essential mechanisms for reducing gender disparities. These approaches recognise that sustainable improvements in leadership representation require institutional transformation rather than isolated interventions directed solely at individual women.

The review also demonstrates growing consensus regarding the importance of organisational support mechanisms for women's leadership development. Studies consistently emphasise that mentorship, sponsorship, networking opportunities, leadership training, and family-friendly workplace policies significantly improve women's career advancement and leadership readiness (UNESCO, 2021; International Labour Organization, 2019). Institutions that intentionally invest in these initiatives report greater diversity within leadership structures, improved staff engagement, and enhanced organisational performance. These findings suggest that leadership equity should be viewed not merely as an issue of representation but as an organisational strategy that strengthens institutional effectiveness and professional sustainability.

The reviewed literature highlights the critical role of professional associations, educational institutions, and policymakers in advancing gender-equitable leadership within the Library and Information Science profession. Professional associations are increasingly recognised as important platforms for leadership development, mentoring, policy advocacy, and professional networking. Similarly, library schools and higher education institutions play a strategic role in preparing future leaders by integrating gender-responsive leadership development into professional education and creating opportunities for women to develop administrative competencies early in their careers. Collectively, the literature suggests that sustainable progress requires coordinated action involving educational institutions, library management, professional associations, government agencies, and

policymakers to create enabling environments in which leadership opportunities are determined by competence, experience, and merit rather than gender.

Discussion

The findings of this review reveal a persistent paradox within the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession: although women constitute the majority of the workforce, their numerical dominance has not translated into equitable representation in leadership and administrative positions. This observation is consistent with international scholarship demonstrating that the feminisation of librarianship has not eliminated structural inequalities in career advancement or access to decision-making roles (Bladek, 2019; Lombard, 2018; Ashiq & Warraich, 2023). Rather than reflecting deficiencies in competence or professional commitment, the evidence suggests that leadership disparities are sustained by organisational cultures, institutional practices, and broader societal expectations regarding gender and authority.

A major finding emerging from this review is that leadership inequity in librarianship is primarily structural rather than individual. Women entering the profession generally possess educational qualifications and professional competencies comparable to those of their male counterparts; however, progression into senior leadership positions is frequently constrained by institutional barriers, including limited access to mentoring, professional networks, leadership development opportunities, and transparent promotion systems. A narrative review by Ashiq and Warraich (2023) identified gender discrimination, organisational culture, administrative barriers, workplace harassment, and inadequate leadership preparation as recurring challenges confronting female library professionals across different contexts. Likewise, Lombard (2018) found that family responsibilities, limited social capital, and persistent gender stereotypes continue to influence perceptions of leadership suitability within academic libraries. Similar findings were reported by Eva et al. (2021), who observed significant gender differences in remuneration, career progression, family responsibilities, and professional recognition among academic librarians, suggesting that gender continues to influence career trajectories even within a predominantly female profession.

The Nigerian experience reflects these broader international patterns while presenting additional socio-cultural complexities. The findings support the argument that patriarchal values remain deeply embedded within organisational and societal structures, thereby influencing leadership recruitment, promotion, and succession within libraries. Adekoya (2020) observed that many Nigerian women academic librarians continue to encounter a "glass ceiling" despite possessing the qualifications and experience necessary for leadership positions. Likewise, Anunobi et al. (2012) reported that Nigerian female academic librarians continue to navigate institutional, technological, and professional challenges while striving for career advancement. Beyond Nigeria, Adjah and Van der Walt (2019) found that female librarians in Ghana experienced slow career progression due to organisational barriers, limited mentoring opportunities, and institutional constraints. Collectively, these findings reinforce the position that leadership inequalities cannot be explained solely by organisational factors but are closely connected to prevailing societal norms concerning gender and power.

The review further demonstrates that feminist perspectives provide an appropriate analytical framework for understanding these persistent disparities. Feminist scholarship shifts attention away from individual shortcomings and towards the institutional arrangements, power relations, and

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organisational cultures that reproduce gender inequality. Consistent with this perspective, Ashiq et al. (2021) found that women academic library leaders in Pakistan attributed their leadership success to resilience, institutional support, mentoring, and professional commitment despite encountering significant organisational and socio-cultural barriers. Their findings suggest that sustainable improvements in women's leadership require structural reforms that create equitable opportunities for career progression rather than expecting women to overcome institutional barriers individually. These perspectives align closely with the objectives of the present study, which views gender equity not as preferential treatment but as the creation of institutional environments where leadership is determined by competence, integrity, and professional merit.

Another important implication of the findings concerns the continuing influence of gender stereotypes within librarianship. Although librarianship has historically been regarded as a female-dominated profession, leadership itself continues to be associated with traditionally masculine characteristics, including authority, assertiveness, and decisiveness. Such stereotypes create implicit biases that influence recruitment, promotion, and perceptions of leadership effectiveness. Radford and Radford (1997) demonstrated that stereotypical constructions of the female librarian continue to shape professional identity and perceptions of authority. Similarly, Bladek (2019) observed that despite women's numerical dominance within librarianship, leadership positions remain disproportionately occupied by men, indicating that organisational perceptions of leadership continue to favour traditional gender norms. These findings suggest that increasing women's numerical participation alone cannot eliminate leadership disparities unless prevailing assumptions regarding gender and leadership are simultaneously challenged.

The literature also indicates that effective interventions extend beyond policy declarations to include deliberate institutional investment in leadership development. Mentorship programmes, sponsorship, succession planning, professional networking, research visibility, and leadership training consistently emerge as strategies capable of improving women's progression into senior positions (Ashiq & Warraich, 2023; Ashiq et al., 2021; Adjah & Van der Walt, 2019). Equally important is the establishment of transparent recruitment and promotion processes that minimise subjective decision-making and provide equal opportunities for qualified professionals irrespective of gender. Such interventions strengthen not only gender equity but also institutional effectiveness by broadening the pool of leadership talent available to libraries and professional associations.

The evidence reviewed suggests that achieving gender-equitable leadership within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession requires coordinated action involving library management, higher education institutions, professional associations, and policymakers. Sustainable progress depends upon dismantling structural barriers, strengthening institutional accountability, promoting feminist-informed leadership practices, and creating organisational cultures that recognise leadership as a function of professional competence rather than gender. Addressing these interconnected challenges would enhance not only women's representation in leadership but also the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and long-term sustainability of the Library and Information Science profession.

Conclusion

This review demonstrates that achieving gender equity in leadership within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession requires more than increasing women's numerical representation. Despite women's dominance within the profession, persistent institutional, socio-cultural, and organisational barriers continue to constrain their advancement into leadership positions. Feminist perspectives provide a valuable framework for understanding and addressing these inequalities by advocating inclusive policies, transparent promotion systems, mentorship, and leadership development. Sustainable progress depends on the collective commitment of library management, professional associations, educational institutions, and policymakers to dismantle structural barriers and create enabling environments where leadership is determined by competence, merit, and equal opportunity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, it is evident that advancing gender equity in leadership within the Nigerian Library and Information Science profession requires deliberate and sustained institutional action. The following recommendations are therefore proposed:

1. Library management should establish transparent, merit-based recruitment, promotion, and succession policies that ensure equal opportunities for qualified professionals regardless of gender.
2. The Nigerian Library Association and other professional bodies should develop structured mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership development programmes to prepare women for senior administrative and leadership positions.
3. Library and Information Science schools should integrate gender-responsive leadership and management training into their curricula to equip future professionals with inclusive leadership competencies.
4. Higher education institutions should implement family-friendly workplace policies and flexible support systems that enable women to balance professional and personal responsibilities without compromising career progression.
5. Policymakers and institutional leaders should strengthen gender-responsive governance through periodic monitoring, accountability mechanisms, and the enforcement of policies that promote equitable representation in leadership and decision-making positions.

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