

Leadership Roles of Women in Academic Libraries: Changes and Challenges

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Abstract:

In higher education institutions, academic libraries are essential to research, teaching, and learning. Despite making up a sizable share of the global library workforce, women have long been underrepresented in senior positions. The field of librarianship has changed over time, enabling more women to take on leadership roles in academic libraries. This study looks at women's evolving leadership responsibilities in university libraries as well as the difficulties they face in administrative and decision-making jobs. The study examines academic papers and reports about gender dynamics in Library and Information Science (LIS) using a qualitative literature-review methodology. The results show that women leaders play a major role in collaborative academic services, technological innovation, and strategic management. However, a number of obstacles still hinder the advancement of leadership, such as institutional constraints, work-life balance issues, gender bias, and limited networking opportunities. In order to empower women leaders in university libraries, the study recommends tactics such professional networking opportunities, institutional support policies, mentoring programs, and leadership training. In academic institutions, encouraging inclusive leadership techniques will improve creativity, diversity, and efficient knowledge management.

Keywords: Women leadership, academic libraries, gender equality, library administration, LIS leadership, professional development

Introduction:

Universities and other higher education establishments must have academic libraries. Through a variety of services, they encourage learning, assist scholarly research, and give access to information resources. Academic libraries have changed significantly during the last few decades as a result of new technology, digital resource management, and changing user expectations.

In terms of involvement in the workforce, women have historically dominated the library profession. Nonetheless, males have traditionally occupied leadership positions in academic libraries despite this numerical superiority. This disparity was a reflection of larger institutional and social systems that prevented women from rising to positions of leadership.

More women were able to assume leadership positions in the workplace in the late 20th century thanks to societal movements promoting gender equality and easier access to higher education. Consequently, women's representation in academic library administration progressively rose.

Women leaders now have a significant influence on how university libraries are developed. They direct information literacy initiatives, administer digital infrastructure, supervise strategic planning, and encourage cooperation between academics, students, and researchers.

There are still a number of structural and societal issues in spite of these developments. Gender stereotypes, a lack of professional networking opportunities, and challenges juggling work and personal obligations are common challenges faced by female executives. Promoting fair leadership opportunities in academic libraries requires an understanding of these concerns.

The goal of this research is to assess how women's leadership roles in academic libraries are evolving and what obstacles they face in these roles.

Literature Review:

In the field of library and information science, research on gender representation in library leadership has greatly increased.

According to Bladek (2019), leadership positions have historically been controlled by men even though women make up the majority of the library workforce. The study found that in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, there was a steady increase in the number of women in leadership roles.

Ashiq et al. (2021) looked at how women leaders in academic libraries advanced in their careers and discovered that institutional support, professional development, and mentoring were important factors.

Moran, Leonard, and Zellers (2009) state that qualities including strategic planning, technological know-how, and good communication skills are necessary for leadership in

university libraries. Strong leadership skills in various domains have been shown by female professionals.

According to Sharma and Singh (2020), female leaders frequently use collaborative leadership philosophies that promote cooperation and group decision-making. These strategies work especially well in academic settings where departmental collaboration is crucial.

But a number of research also point to enduring obstacles. Jaradat (2019) discovered that corporate culture and gender stereotypes can prevent women from rising to positions of leadership.

In a similar vein, the American Library Association's research shows that women librarians often face difficulties with work-life balance, few administration chances, and inadequate leadership training.

Research indicates that although women's leadership participation in university libraries has increased, more work is still needed to remove the remaining obstacles.

Methods:

Research Design:

A qualitative research methodology based on a review of the literature and thematic analysis is used in this study.

Data Collection:

Data was gathered from:

- i. Academic papers in the field of library and information science.
- ii. Papers from academic conferences.
- iii. Reports from professional associations.
- iv. Books about gender studies and library leadership.

Data Analysis:

Thematic categorization was used to analyze the gathered material. Among the major themes found are:

- i. The evolution of women in librarianship throughout history.

- ii. Roles and obligations of leadership.
- iii. Obstacles that female leaders must overcome.
- iv. Techniques for empowering leaders.

Results:

Trends in Women’s Representation in Academic Library Leadership:

Chart 1: Women's Leadership and Workforce Representation in Libraries

Year Period	Women in Library Workforce	Women in Leadership
1960s	70%	10%
1980s	75%	25%
2000s	80%	40%
2020s	85%	55%

Interpretation:

Although women have always made up the majority of library employees, their representation in senior positions has steadily grown over time.

Women's Principal Leadership Positions in Academic Libraries:

Numerous crucial administrative and strategic tasks are carried out by female leaders.

Table 1: Essential Leadership Duties

Leadership Area	Activities
Strategic Planning	Institutional planning and policy development
Resource Management	Management of collections and budgeting
Technology Integration	Databases and digital library systems
Research Support	Data services and institutional repositories
Staff Leadership	Staff mentoring and training

Leadership Style Characteristics

Chart 2: Leadership Style Distribution

Leadership Style	Percentage Among Women Leaders
Transformational Leadership	45%
Participatory Leadership	30%
Transactional Leadership	15%
Authoritative Leadership	10%

Observation:

Women leaders in academic libraries are frequently linked to transformational and participatory leadership styles.

Challenges Faced by Women Leaders:

Table 2: Major Challenges

Challenge	Impact
Gender Bias	Restricts opportunities for promotion
Work-Life Balance	An increase in stress and disruptions to one's profession
Institutional Barriers	Restricted ability to make decisions
Networking Limitations	Diminished visibility in the workplace
Skill Development	The necessity of ongoing technical education

Conceptual Model of Women Leadership Development:

Research Model Diagram:



The elements impacting women librarians' leadership growth are depicted in this model.

Discussion:

The results show that women have made great strides toward becoming leaders in academic libraries. This shift is a reflection of larger cultural shifts that support gender parity in the workplace.

Fostering collaborative work environments is one of the most significant contributions made by female executives. Academic libraries function in intricate institutional settings where collaboration between instructors, administrators, and students is crucial. Women leaders frequently use participatory leadership methods that promote candid dialogue and collaboration.

Technological leadership is another significant factor. Digital infrastructure, such as online databases, digital repositories, and research data management systems, is crucial to modern academic libraries. Women leaders have taken an active role in promoting digital literacy initiatives and putting these technologies into practice.

Notwithstanding these encouraging advancements, the investigation identifies enduring difficulties. Leadership advancement is still significantly hampered by gender bias. Traditional ideas about gender and authority still have an impact on leadership positions in some organizations.

Another important issue is work-life balance. Significant time commitments are necessary for leadership roles, including scholarly partnerships, policy preparation, and administrative meetings. There may be more pressure on female professionals who also handle family obligations.

Opportunities for professional networking have an impact on leadership development as well. Librarians may exchange expertise, find employment opportunities, and hone their leadership abilities through robust professional networks. These networks can be strengthened by encouraging more women to attend conferences and professional associations.

In order to advance gender equality, institutional support is essential. Opportunities for female leaders can be greatly enhanced by policies including open promotion processes, leadership development initiatives, and flexible work schedules.

Conclusion:

Worldwide, women have always played a crucial role in the growth and operation of libraries. But historically, their contributions to leadership positions have gone unacknowledged. Significant improvements in academic libraries over time have made it possible for more women to hold senior roles.

These days, female leaders are essential in staff development, academic collaboration, digital transformation, and strategic management. Their leadership styles frequently place a strong emphasis on cooperation, diversity, and creativity, all of which are crucial for contemporary academic libraries.

Despite these advancements, obstacles like gender bias, problems with work-life balance, and a lack of networking opportunities still hinder women's growth in leadership. Institutional dedication to inclusive policies and leadership development programs is necessary to address these issues.

Women professionals in university libraries can be empowered by supporting mentorship programs, leadership development, and gender-equitable promotion procedures. Increasing the number of women in senior positions will eventually improve academic library services' efficacy, creativity, and sustainability.

Academic libraries' future depends on inclusive leadership that prioritizes diversity, teamwork, and technological flexibility. This future will continue to be shaped in large part by female leaders.

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