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Developing Inclusive Leadership Among Young Women And Girls

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ABSTRACT
Inclusive leadership involves creating equal opportunities for underrepresented groups to take on leadership roles. Despite this ideal, many societies still predominantly assign leadership positions to men, while encouraging girls to be followers rather than leaders. This disparity undermines the confidence, competence, and long-term prospects of young women. This article explores why fostering inclusive leadership among young women and girl's matters. It identifies key obstacles they encounter including entrenched cultural norms, gender bias, insufficient mentorship, and restricted access to leadership development programs. Drawing on established leadership and learning frameworks, the article explains how leadership abilities develop when individuals receive encouragement, mentoring opportunities, and institutional backing. The findings show that leadership identity among young women and girls is socially and communicatively constructed through media representation, educational practices, family discourse, and institutional messaging. Where leadership is portrayed as male-dominated, girls tend to develop lower leadership confidence and aspiration. However, inclusive communication environments, visible female role models, participatory school systems, and digital media access significantly strengthen leadership identity and ambition. The article demonstrates through practical illustrations how various stakeholders including families, educational institutions, mass communication systems, community organizations, and government bodies can use communication, representation, and participatory platforms to support young women and girls in becoming effective inclusive leaders.. This effort is vital because expanding leadership opportunities for women strengthens gender equality, enhances organizational and societal decision-making, and contributes to sustainable progress in communities worldwide.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership, Young Women, Girls' Empowerment, Gender Equality, Leadership Development, Gender Bias, Mentorship, Female Role Models, Social Construction of Leadership, Media Representation, Educational Practices, Women in Leadership, Youth Development, Participatory Communication, Leadership Identity

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the ability to guide people and help them work together to achieve shared goals. All people can participate in inclusive leadership, regardless of their gender, age, or background, according to Northouse (2021). In many parts of the world, leadership opportunities are not equally dispersed. Gender stereotypes, cultural norms, and societal expectations sometimes inhibit young women and girls from taking on leadership roles. While many girls are trained to be quiet, obedient, and helpful from an early age, boys are encouraged to speak, take the initiative, and make decisions. Girls' self-perception and future goals are influenced by these early lessons (Bandura, 2021). As a result, many young women grow

up without confidence in their ability to lead, although having the knowledge and abilities needed to do so.

Promoting inclusive leadership among young women and girls is essential for social progress. When women occupy leadership roles, communities benefit from a variety of viewpoints, enhanced communication, and more equitable decision-making (Eagly & Carli, 2022). Furthermore, inclusive leadership reduces inequality and promotes respect for variety. Families, schools, the media, and local groups all have a big impact on leadership attitudes. Girls learn to voice their thoughts and assume responsibility when they are given equal opportunities to lead in clubs, schools, and community events. Giving young women leadership chances helps create a more balanced and sustainable society, according to UN Women (2022). Communication systems that influence identity, aspirations, and societal roles are inextricably linked to inclusive leadership development. The main socialization agents that spread gender norms and leadership standards are mass communication organizations like media outlets, educational institutions, and internet platforms. Young women and girls internalize ideas about who is qualified to be a leader through continuous exposure to symbolic messages, narratives, and representations. As a result, leadership development needs to be viewed as a communication-driven social construction influenced by media discourse, representation systems, and institutional communication structures in addition to being a personal or educational process.

Statement of the Problem

Social and cultural norms that restrict girls' prospects for leadership are a significant issue. Girls are taught in many countries that women are supposed to assist rather than take the lead and that men should be the primary leaders. These ideas have an impact on how girls view themselves and lower their self-confidence while assuming leadership positions. The dearth of opportunity for young women and girls to hone their leadership abilities is another issue. Girls are frequently denied opportunities to lead events, take part in decision-making, or occupy leadership roles in schools and communities. This restricts their experience and keeps them from acquiring critical leadership abilities like accountability, confidence, and communication.

Young women's and girls' leadership development is also impacted by the lack of strong female role models. Girls may think that leadership is not for them if they do not see women in leadership roles. This idea is reinforced by media portrayals of women as followers and males as leaders. Additionally, young women and girls' growth of inclusive leadership is also hampered by their lack of access to mentorship, supportive environments, and leadership training. Together, these obstacles prevent women from occupying leadership positions and impede social advancement. This study argues that media systems, communication institutions, symbolic representation, and discourse structures socially shape leadership identity, aspiration, and involvement, positioning mass communication as a structural basis of inclusive leadership development. Therefore, communication ecology rather than just individual drive or educational access is the result of inclusive leadership among young women and girls.

Objective

This article's primary goal is to investigate how young women and girls might create inclusive leadership. The study's precise goals are to:

1. Examine the social and cultural variables that restrict young women's and girls' prospects for leadership.
2. List the main obstacles that young women and girls must overcome in order to acquire leadership abilities.
3. Describe the significance of inclusive leadership in advancing social progress and equality.
4. Talk about leadership theories that describe how young girls and women can acquire and hone their leadership abilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Inclusive Leadership

A leadership approach known as "inclusive leadership" permits all people, regardless of gender, background, or social standing, to engage, contribute, and feel appreciated. It is leadership that pays attention, encourages, and makes room for diverse voices, particularly those who are frequently disregarded, like young women and girls. Traditional leadership and inclusive leadership are not the same. A few individuals at the top make all of the choices in traditional leadership, which frequently emphasizes control and authority. Conversely, inclusive leadership emphasizes collaboration, equity, and shared accountability. Instead of controlling people, it promotes leaders to collaborate with them (Northouse, 2021). According to Shore and Chung (2022). Inclusive leadership involves a set of leader behaviors that facilitate a sense of belongingness and uniqueness, creating a climate where marginalized voices, particularly women in male-dominated spaces, are not only heard but integrated into the decision-making structure. Inclusive leadership entails giving young women and girls the self-assurance and chance to lead, speak, and have an impact on decisions. Many females are raised in settings that don't value their opinions. According to academics, inclusive leaders foster spaces where people may voice their opinions without worrying about criticism or punishment. Shore et al. (2018) assert that inclusion entails both engagement and belonging. This implies that young women should be permitted to actively participate in leadership roles in addition to being present.

Empathy and comprehension are also valued by inclusive leadership. Inclusionary leaders make an effort to comprehend the experiences of others and provide appropriate support. For young women and girls, this is crucial since they frequently deal with particular difficulties like prejudice, low expectations, and a lack of support. Giving girls leadership responsibilities, promoting teamwork, and rewarding cooperation over competitiveness are all ways to foster inclusive leadership in school and community contexts. Girls gain leadership qualities like responsibility, communication, and problem-solving when they participate in decision-making processes.

Inclusive Leadership and Gender Development

Scholarly literature identified inclusive leadership as a leadership approach that values participation, equity, diversity, and shared decision-making (Shore et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership goes beyond representation by emphasizing psychological safety, belongingness, and active engagement of marginalized groups in leadership processes. According to Northouse (2021), inclusive leadership is rooted in relational leadership practices that promote empowerment, collaboration, and shared responsibility. This model is particularly relevant for young women and girls who are historically excluded from leadership structures due to cultural and social barriers.

Women leaders' early socialization experiences, which provided them with leadership techniques as well as beliefs and characteristics that shaped their approach, had an impact on their leadership development processes. These behaviors are then validated by their various stages of development (Onditi & Odero, 2020). The narratives surrounding Nigerian women's journey towards political, social, and economic empowerment [are influenced by] communication narratives; little to no effort is made to portray, promote, and document their participation. The media are a strong instrument (Mmutle, 2018). Language is a tool used in the construction of gender identities and power dynamics. Language is a fundamental instrument that shapes and reflects a society's culture and beliefs and helps people make sense of their thoughts. Gender socialization occurs through four major agents: family, schools, peer groups, and mass media. Each agent reinforces gender roles by creating and maintaining normative expectations for gender-specific behavior (Pressbooks, 2021).

Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that leadership structures have traditionally been shaped by patriarchal norms that privilege masculine leadership traits such as dominance, control, and authority, while undervaluing relational and collaborative leadership styles often associated with women. The obstacle for women is not a single 'glass ceiling' but a labyrinth a complex journey of subtle and obvious barriers. These barriers are rooted in the 'think manager, think male' phenomenon, where leadership is equated with agentic traits like dominance and control.

From a gender development perspective, leadership identity is socially constructed through interaction, observation, and socialization processes (Bandura, 1977). Girls develop perceptions of leadership based on what they observe in families, schools, communities, and institutions. When leadership is consistently represented as male-dominated, girls internalize leadership as incompatible with femininity, leading to low leadership self-efficacy and aspiration Eagly (2002).

Media, Communication, and Leadership Socialization

Mass communication continues to be the primary architect of leadership perceptions, though the mechanism has shifted from traditional broadcasting to algorithmic curation. Media content remains a critical agent of socialization, yet it now functions through "datafied" cultural flows that reinforce or disrupt traditional norms (Couldry & Hepp, 2020). Through short-form video (TikTok), streaming narratives, and AI-generated content, society negotiates the symbolic boundaries of authority. Sobande (2023) argues that media representations in the digital age often perform "digital consumer feminism," where women are visible but often commodified, continuing a form of symbolic marginalization. This exclusion persists through "algorithmic bias," where search engines and social media feeds prioritize traditional, often masculine, archetypes of power (Noble, 2018; Benjamin, 2019). Van Gorp & Vercruysse (2023) suggest that leadership is increasingly framed through "authenticity" and "relatability," yet young women still face a "double bind" where they must balance professional assertiveness with digital likability. While McCombs' agenda-setting remains relevant, Rashed & Turow (2024) argue that "niche-setting" on social media now determines which female leaders gain salience in specific demographic echoes.

However, digital platforms offer "counter-spaces." Building on the work of Jackson, Bailey, and Foucault Welles (2020) regarding #HashtagActivism, young women are utilizing platforms like Instagram and TikTok to bypass legacy media gatekeepers. This shift reflects Matthews' (2022) concept of "affective leadership," where influence is built through emotional connection and networked community rather than institutional titles. Finally, Pangrazio and Sefton-Green (2021) emphasize that "data literacy"—the evolved form of media literacy—is now the essential tool for empowering girls to decode digital structures and author their own leadership narratives.

Education, Communication Systems, and Leadership Development

According to research, educational institutions serve as social and cultural transmission systems that use institutional messages, formal structures, and interaction patterns to mold students' identities, values, and norms (Boateng & Agyei, 2025). According to Kirisci-Sarıkaya and Fayda-Kinik (2025), educators' relational experiences, beliefs, and professional practices shape their leadership identities in educational settings. The significance of gender-responsive educational systems that promote fair leadership development and learning environments for all students is emphasized in UNESCO's 2025 Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2025). In a similar vein, UNESCO's Meaningful young Engagement Handbook contends that authentic young voices and participatory learning foster learners' agency and leadership confidence. According to recent research based on social identity theory, leadership identity affects relational dynamics and communication strategies that mold school culture and personal self-perception (Nolan, 2025).

Role Models, Representation, and Leadership Identity

Recent scholarship reaffirms that leadership development is a communicative construct, deeply embedded in symbolic representation (Pino-Morgado et al., 2023). Integrating Social Learning Theory, researchers argue that for girls, leadership self-efficacy is contingent upon the visibility of female archetypes; when media narratives are gender-skewed, they facilitate a 'symbolic annihilation' that discourages leadership aspiration (Dasgupta & Rivera, 2022). This is further explained by Cultivation Theory, where the persistent 'masculinization' of authority in digital and mass media shapes a reality where girls internalize leadership as an out-group trait (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2023). Consequently, normalizing female leadership requires a deliberate shift in the discursive and visual systems of communication institutions to foster robust identity formation.

Gender and Leadership Development

The development of leadership abilities is significantly influenced by gender. Boys and girls are typically treated differently from an early age. Boys are usually pushed to be strong, assertive, and in charge, while women are expected to be calm, polite, and supportive. Young girls and women's perceptions of leadership and their potential for it are influenced by these early lessons. Leadership development encompasses not only skills but also opportunity and confidence. Many women have the potential to be leaders, but they are not given the chance. If girls are not given leadership roles in their communities or schools, they may begin to doubt their abilities. Low self-esteem and a fear of responsibility inevitably follow from this.

Researchers claim that social expectations have an impact on leadership. According to Eagly and Karau (2002), leaders are often expected by society to behave in ways that are generally associated with men. As a result, it is harder for women and girls to be acknowledged as leaders. Even when girls show leadership qualities, they could be subjected to more severe criticism than boys. Education has a big impact on how leaders develop. When schools allow girls to take charge of group activities and promote fair participation, they gain confidence. However, women still have fewer opportunities to take the lead in many situations, especially when it comes to decision-making roles. Cultural beliefs also influence leadership development. In some cultures, leadership by women is discouraged or seen as disrespectful. These beliefs limit the dreams and ambitions of young women. As a result, many girls grow up believing leadership is not meant for them. Media representation further shapes leadership development. When leadership in movies, news, and social media is shown mostly through male characters, girls may struggle to see themselves as leaders. Positive images of female leaders help girls imagine leadership as something they can achieve.

Challenges Facing Young Women and Girls in Leadership

It is tough for young women and girls to become leaders because of the numerous obstacles they must overcome. Family history, culture, education, the economy, and society at large all contribute to these difficulties. Many girls are prevented from discovering or developing their leadership skills due to these obstacles. Cultural belief is one of the main obstacles. Leadership is viewed as a male obligation in many countries. Instead of being encouraged to take the lead, girls are instead taught to comply. Girls who are raised in such settings can think that they are not cut out for leadership roles. Their confidence and readiness to assume leadership positions in later life are impacted by this idea.

Lack of confidence is another problem. Because they are not encouraged to speak up or make decisions, many girls have self-doubt. Girls start to believe that their voices are unimportant when their opinions are consistently disregarded. Their involvement in leadership initiatives in communities and schools is hampered by this lack of confidence. Another significant issue is the lack of access to training and education. Due to familial obligations, early marriage, or poverty, some girls are unable to attend school on a regular basis. It becomes challenging for them to acquire the abilities required to lead successfully in the absence of appropriate education and leadership training (UNESCO, 2023). Another significant issue is the lack of female role models. Girls may find it difficult to believe that they can become leaders if they do not see women in leadership roles. Girls are inspired to pursue leadership aspirations when they witness women in leadership roles. Stereotypes in the media have an impact on leadership development as well. Men are frequently seen as powerful leaders, whereas women and girls are frequently shown as weak, emotional, or reliant. Women's perceptions of themselves and how society perceives them are influenced by these representations (Gill, 2021). Opportunities for leadership are further restricted by economic difficulties. The education of boys is often given precedence over that of girls. Girls thus lose out on chances to develop become leaders. These challenges, if not addressed, will continue to prevent young women and girls from participating fully in leadership. Overcoming them requires support from families, schools, communities, media, and governments.

Role of Education in Developing Inclusive Leadership

For young women and girls to build inclusive leadership, education is crucial. One of the first settings where kids learn how to communicate, exchange ideas, and assume responsibilities is school. Girls are more likely to become leaders when schools encourage equitable involvement. Students can learn how to

lead at many schools through leadership roles including club executives, group leaders, and class prefects. Girls acquire confidence and learn decision-making skills when they are encouraged to participate in these positions. However, guys continue to hold the majority of leadership positions in some schools, which hinders girls' ability to develop as leaders.

The growth of leadership is greatly influenced by teachers. Girls' confidence is boosted by teachers who encourage them to participate in group projects, speak up in class, and voice their thoughts. Girls feel appreciated and respected when teachers treat males and girls equally. Leadership development is also influenced by the school curriculum. Students can build leadership skills by taking courses that encourage cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. Girls learn that leadership is a skill that can be acquired rather than something that is innate when leadership education is incorporated into educational programs. Institutions of higher learning also have an impact. Young women can practice leadership through seminars, leadership courses, and student organizations. Education systems that support gender equality aid in closing the leadership gap between men and women, according to UNESCO (2023). Leadership development is also aided by non-formal learning settings including community initiatives, athletics, and debates. When girls are allowed to participate freely in these activities, they learn responsibility and teamwork.

Role of Media in Shaping Leadership Aspirations of Girls

In many media contents, leadership roles are often given to men, while women are shown in supporting or domestic roles. When girls constantly see men as leaders and women as followers, they may begin to believe that leadership is not meant for them. This repeated exposure shapes their dreams and ambitions. Positive media representation can change this situation. When girls see women portrayed as strong leaders in news stories, movies, and documentaries, they begin to imagine themselves in similar roles. According to Gill (2021), media images play a strong role in shaping gender identity and self-confidence.

Social media has also become an important space for leadership development. Through platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, young women can share ideas, speak on social issues, and build influence. Social media allows girls to express their opinions freely and connect with other female leaders around the world. However, media can also present challenges. Online harassment and negative comments often target young women who speak out publicly. This can discourage girls from expressing their views or taking leadership roles online. Media literacy education helps girls understand how to use media safely and confidently. Media organizations have a responsibility to promote inclusive leadership by representing women fairly and positively. When media content challenges stereotypes and promotes equality, it supports leadership development among young women and girls.

Benefits of Inclusive Leadership for Society

Young women and girls as well as society at large gain from inclusive leadership. Decisions become more equitable and balanced when leadership involves individuals with diverse experiences and backgrounds. Everyone may offer ideas and solutions thanks to inclusive leadership, which enhances societal growth. Improved decision-making is a key advantage of inclusive leadership. Different perspectives are taken into account when women are in leadership roles. This aids leaders in comprehending the requirements of a larger population. Diverse leadership teams frequently produce better and more deliberate judgments, according to studies (Eagly & Carli, 2022). Additionally, inclusive leadership advances social equality. The idea that leadership is exclusive to one gender is challenged when young women and girls are offered leadership chances. This encourages justice in society and lessens discrimination. Girls are more inclined to support equality if they witness women in leadership roles as they grow up. Economic development is an additional advantage. When women take on leadership roles, they offer ideas that boost creativity and productivity. Because skills are fully utilized rather than squandered, societies that promote female leaders frequently see growth.

Moreover, inclusive leadership promotes harmony and collaboration. Inclusion-focused leaders are more likely to listen and promote conversation. This fosters understanding between various communities and lessens conflict. Women leaders are frequently linked to cooperative leadership philosophies that encourage amicable resolutions. Inclusive leadership fosters self-worth and confidence in young girls and

women. Encouraging girls to take the lead helps them become more independent, responsible, and skilled communicators. These abilities aid in their success in daily life as well as leadership positions.

Theoretical Framework

The concepts that guide this study are explained through a theoretical framework, which demonstrates how leadership abilities may be acquired, reinforced, and socialized. This article explains how young women and girls can develop inclusive leadership using four primary theories: Transformational Leadership Theory, Social Learning Theory, Framing Theory, and Agenda-Setting Theory. These theories collectively provide a multidisciplinary perspective, integrating leadership development with communication, media representation, and socialization processes.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns (1978) introduced the Transformational Leadership Theory, later developed by Bass (1985). The theory views leadership as a process in which leaders encourage, inspire, and assist individuals in reaching their full potential. Transformational leaders emphasize support, empowerment, and positive influence rather than coercion or control. This approach is particularly relevant for young women and girls who often grow up with low self-esteem due to societal and cultural expectations. Girls who are given opportunities to lead projects or community activities develop accountability, self-assurance, and respect for inclusivity, all of which are essential components of inclusive leadership.

Social Learning Theory

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) posits that people acquire knowledge, skills, and behaviors by observing others, particularly role models. Young girls internalize leadership behaviors by witnessing women in leadership positions, either in their immediate environment or in broader societal narratives. When leadership is predominantly portrayed as a male domain, girls may feel discouraged from aspiring to lead. However, consistent exposure to positive female role models in families, schools, and media allows girls to develop leadership self-efficacy. This theory emphasizes the importance of observation, imitation, and reinforcement in shaping leadership identity, demonstrating that leadership is as much a socialized behavior as it is an individual skill.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory, developed by Entman (1993), explains how media frames influence public perception by emphasizing certain aspects of reality while downplaying others. In the context of leadership development, media frames can either reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes. When media consistently portrays leaders as assertive, dominant men, young women may internalize the belief that leadership is incompatible with femininity. Conversely, framing leadership through examples of competent women and girls can expand perceptions of who is eligible to lead. This theory highlights the critical role of mass communication in shaping leadership norms, values, and aspirations.

Agenda-Setting Theory

McCombs and Shaw's Agenda-Setting Theory (1972) asserts that the media has the power to determine which topics and issues are considered important in public discourse. Applied to leadership, the limited visibility of female leaders in news, social media, and entertainment reduces the salience of women's leadership opportunities in societal consciousness. Conversely, prioritizing female leadership stories in media platforms increases awareness, motivation, and the perceived attainability of leadership roles for young women and girls. Agenda-setting theory underscores the intersection between communication, representation, and leadership identity formation.

While Social Learning Theory concentrates on observation and modeling, Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes drive and self-assurance. When taken as a whole, these theories clarify how young women and girls can develop inclusive leadership. Girls are more likely to acquire leadership abilities when they receive emotional support and are exposed to exemplary leadership. These theories contribute to the explanation of why inclusive leadership involves both societal support and individual encouragement. However, this study places inclusive leadership development within both individual behavioral processes and larger social communication systems by fusing Transformational Leadership Theory and Social Learning Theory with Framing and Agenda-Setting Theories. In addition to personal

experiences and mentoring, girls' leadership potential is fostered by symbolic and media-mediated representations that affirm their potential and legitimize their involvement in leadership roles.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative conceptual research design grounded in a systematic desk review and analytical synthesis of existing literature. The research is non-empirical and does not involve primary data collection. Instead, it integrates perspectives from leadership studies, gender studies, mass communication, and education to develop a conceptual understanding of inclusive leadership development among young women and girls. The approach is appropriate for theory-building and conceptual clarification rather than statistical measurement, consistent with qualitative research traditions (Creswell, 2014).

Sources of Data

Data were derived exclusively from secondary sources. These included peer-reviewed journal articles retrieved through Google Scholar, scholarly books on leadership and gender, institutional reports, policy documents, and publications from reputable international organizations such as UNESCO, UN Women, and World Bank. Only academically credible, peer-reviewed, and verifiable materials were included to ensure scholarly rigor and reliability.

Inclusion Criteria

Sources were selected based on:

- Relevance to inclusive leadership and gender development.
- Conceptual or empirical linkage to communication, media, or socialization processes.
- Academic credibility and peer-review status.
- Combination of foundational theoretical works and recent scholarly contributions.
- Verifiability through recognized academic databases.

Analytical Procedure

The study utilized thematic content analysis. Selected texts were systematically reviewed, coded, and organized into thematic categories such as gender socialization and leadership identity, media representation and leadership perception, communication structures and leadership development, educational systems and leadership socialization, cultural narratives and inclusion, and digital media in youth leadership formation. These themes were synthesized to construct an integrated conceptual framework linking inclusive leadership with gender development and mass communication systems.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis was guided by established multidisciplinary theories, including Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner et al., 2002). These frameworks collectively explain how leadership identity and inclusive practices are shaped through social learning, communication processes, media representation, and cultural socialization.

Ethical Considerations

As the study relied solely on secondary data, no human participants were involved. Ethical standards were upheld through proper citation and referencing, adherence to academic integrity, avoidance of plagiarism, respect for intellectual property, and accurate representation of authors' ideas.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Communication systems encompassing family interactions, school discourse, media narratives, and institutional messaging play a decisive role in shaping how girls perceive their leadership potential. According to data from the Girl Scout Research Institute (2024)**,** inclusive and participatory communication environments are critical to this development; approximately 87% of girls who participate in programs emphasizing "safe-space" communication and hands-on leadership reported significant gains in professional success skills and self-confidence. Conversely, where leadership is symbolically framed as

a male-dominated domain, girls tend to internalize lower levels of leadership self-efficacy. This confirms that leadership development is deeply embedded within broader processes of socialization and cultural meaning-making.

The analysis further demonstrates that media representation functions as a primary driver of leadership aspirations and identity formation. Persistent portrayals of men as the default figures of authority reinforce gendered stereotypes, while the visible presence of women in leadership roles enhances identification and motivation among girls. However, global data suggests a significant "visibility gap." The Reuters Institute (2025) reports that women occupy only 27% of top editorial roles across 12 major markets, despite making up a significant portion of the total media workforce. This lack of representation in "communicative gatekeeping" roles restricts the variety of leadership narratives available to young women. When media organizations maintain hierarchical and exclusionary structures, they reinforce the "symbolic annihilation" of female leaders, thereby signaling to girls that their participation in high-level decision-making is restricted. Furthermore, the research highlights the critical importance of observational learning through female role models. The presence of women in visible positions of power acts as a counter-narrative to traditional gender roles, yet the "leaky pipeline" remains a structural barrier. Data from the World Economic Forum (2024) indicates a stark decline in female representation as one moves up the institutional hierarchy, with women holding roughly 46% of entry-level positions but only 25% of C-suite roles. This disparity functions as a communicative signal to young women regarding their "place" within institutional structures. The findings suggest that when girls are exposed to female role models in STEM, politics, and corporate sectors, their leadership self-efficacy strengthens. Thus, institutions such as schools and media organizations serve as pivotal sites for either enabling or restricting leadership participation based on whether their communicative structures are inclusive or exclusionary.

Finally, the findings indicate that the "ambition gap" is often a reflection of external messaging rather than internal capability. The Geena Davis Institute (2024) found that in family-oriented media, male characters continue to hold leadership positions at a ratio of nearly 2:1 compared to female characters. This persistent imbalance in representation underscores the role of media as a socialization agent that shapes the boundaries of what is considered "appropriate" or "possible" for girls. Ultimately, the results of this study confirm that for young women and girls, the journey toward leadership identity is not merely an individual psychological process but a communicative one, mediated by the visibility of role models and the inclusivity of institutional discourse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several actions can be implemented to encourage inclusive leadership among young women and girls based on the discussion in this article. Families, schools, the media, communities, and governmental organizations are the main targets of these suggestions.

1. Families should first encourage females to become leaders. Girls should be encouraged by their parents and guardians to participate in decision-making and voice their thoughts at home. Girls can develop confidence from a young age by taking simple steps like letting them chose hobbies, speak openly, and assume responsibility.
2. Schools ought to give both boys and girls equal leadership chances. Girls should be encouraged to run for leadership roles including club leaders, prefects, and class reps. Teachers should encourage girls to actively participate in class discussions and group activities and treat boys and girls equally.
3. Young women and girls should participate in leadership development programs. To educate leadership qualities like problem-solving, cooperation, and communication, schools, non-governmental organizations, and community groups can provide seminars, workshops, and mentorship programs.
4. Positive portrayals of female leaders should be promoted by the media. In news stories, movies, and television shows, media outlets should present women as capable, intellectual, and strong leaders. This will encourage young girls to believe that they can become leaders.
5. Cultural norms that restrict girls' leadership roles should be contested by communities and religious organizations. Leaders in the community should encourage females to assume leadership positions in community events and publicly discuss the value of gender equality.

6. Lastly, governments ought to back laws that encourage female leadership. Governments should encourage leadership development initiatives, provide education for girls, and uphold anti-discrimination legislation. Young women and girls will have more possibilities to acquire inclusive leadership skills and make significant contributions to society if these suggestions are appropriately put into practice.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that cultivating inclusive leadership in young women and girls is a complicated social process influenced by cultural norms, institutional structures, communication systems, and symbolic representation rather from just being a question of personal drive or ability. Through constant socialization, observation, and engagement in homes, schools, media settings, and community organizations, leadership identity develops. Young women are systematically barred from leadership opportunities in areas where these institutions perpetuate gendered hierarchies and prejudices. Leadership development becomes feasible and long-lasting where they encourage participation, inclusiveness, and representation. The study demonstrates that inclusive leadership is essentially a communication-driven construct by combining leadership theory, social learning theory, and mass communication viewpoints. The definition of leadership, who is deemed qualified to lead, and which identities are socially validated are all influenced by media narratives, educational discourse, digital platforms, and institutional messages. Girls' leadership self-efficacy is still being undermined by the ongoing masculinization of leadership in symbolic and communicative systems, whereas inclusive discourse, positive portrayal, and participatory communication help young women develop their leadership identities.

The findings further reveal that families, educational institutions, mass communication systems, community organizations, and government structures function as interconnected leadership socialization agents. When these actors adopt inclusive communication practices, promote female visibility, provide mentorship, and create participatory platforms, they transform leadership from an exclusive structure into a shared social process. Digital media spaces, in particular, offer new opportunities for networked leadership, enabling young women to construct influence, voice, and agency beyond traditional institutional barriers. The study's final conclusion is that structural change, not only symbolic inclusion, is necessary for young women and girls to create inclusive leadership. In order to legitimize female authority, voice, and involvement, communication systems, representation structures, educational practices, and leadership cultures must be reformed. Therefore, increasing young women's access to leadership positions is not just a social necessity for democratic governance, social cohesion, institutional legitimacy, and sustainable development, but also a gender equity imperative. Only when social institutions, cultural narratives, and communication systems work together to recast leadership as a shared human capacity rather than a gendered privilege would an inclusive leadership future be possible.

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