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To cite this article: Samuel Danso, Gifty Appiah-Adjei & Theodora Dame Adjin-Tettey (16 Jul 2025): Vertical representation of gender in the Ghanaian broadcast media, *Feminist Media Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/14680777.2025.2533879](https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2025.2533879)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2025.2533879>



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Published online: 16 Jul 2025.



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Vertical representation of gender in the Ghanaian broadcast media

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ABSTRACT

The gender gap in media organizations has drawn research attention in recent years. This study, through the lens of the glass ceiling concept, draws on interview data to explore how gender is represented in managerial positions within Ghanaian broadcast media. The study's findings indicate that, despite progress towards gender equality, men continue to dominate top managerial positions in Ghana's broadcast media. The absence of institutional policies specifically targeting gender representation perpetuates these inequalities. Further, informal efforts by some media firms to ensure fair representation lack the effectiveness of formal guidelines and accountability mechanisms. Thus, women in the Ghanaian broadcast media experience the "glass ceiling" effect and are excluded from managerial decision-making processes. The study highlights the importance of promoting gender equity and diversity in leadership within the Ghanaian broadcast media.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 February 2025
Revised 2 July 2025
Accepted 8 July 2025

KEYWORDS

Gender; media; underrepresented groups; women; glass ceiling

Introduction

Gender representation in the media is a critical indicator of the inclusive-exclusive or equality-inequality binary (Danon R Carter and Tara Peters 2016). Nonetheless, it has been established that the gendered nature of journalism has resulted in continuous underrepresentation of women (Sara De Vuyst, Susan Vertoont and Sofie Van Bauwel 2016) and representation in a stereotypical manner that reflects the traditional domains and roles in society (Marc Hooghe, Laura Jacobs and Ellen Claes 2015).

Gender representation in the media can be examined from two broad dimensions: horizontal and vertical. Whereas horizontal gender representation focuses on issues about topics, subjects and roles in media productions, vertical gender representation centers on journalistic positions and structure (De Vuyst, Vertoont, and Van Bauwel 2016). The vertical representation of gender, particularly in leadership positions and decision-making processes, is a critical indicator of equity and inclusivity in the media landscape

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(Joke D'Heer, Justine Vergotte, Sara De Vuyst and Sarah Van Leuven 2020). However, women continue to encounter barriers to accessing and ascending into leadership positions within media institutions despite progress toward gender equality in various sectors, including journalism (Global Media Monitoring Project 2020). This underrepresentation raises questions about the diversity of perspectives, the fairness of media content production, and the broader societal implications of reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Explanations for the absence and stereotypical representation of women in the news are traditionally linked with their position in newsrooms (D'Heer et al. 2020). Paula Lobo, Silveirinha Maria João, Torres da Silva Marisa and Subtil Filipa (2017) argue that although the number of female journalists in the newsroom has been consistently increasing, this has not improved women's equal participation in media or gender balance within media organizations. It has been argued that if women in the media reach a representation of 33%, they will form a critical mass, which would result in a better representation of women in the newsroom (Carter and Peters 2016). Yet, longitudinal studies reveal that the number of women working in newsrooms has barely increased over time (GMMP 2020), due to various barriers that impede their progress in the newsroom. Global studies have shown that despite overall historic gains and pockets of progress, women in journalism lag in terms of leadership (GMMP 2020; Lobo et al. 2017; Reuters Institute 2024). Thus, though many women globally aspire to be journalists, most remain concentrated in the lower ranks of management or leave the industry entirely (Carolyn M Byerly 2013).

While Ghana is leading the advancement of gender equality in the West and Central Africa region, the precarity of women's employment, largely driven by social norms that manifest in the exclusion of women from key opportunities, makes them more vulnerable in the labour market (). In the media industry, while some may be unconscious of the degree of inequalities, women tend to face biases in the types of roles they play, potentially causing them to put up with unfair practices (Abena Animwaa Yeboah-Banin, Ivy M Fofie and Audrey Sitsofe Gadzekpo 2024).

The global report on the status of women in news media, released by the Reuters Institute (2024, 8), reports that women represent only 25% of the "top editors in a strategic sample of 240 major online and offline news outlets in 12 different markets across five continents," including Africa. This is problematic because journalism has always been the mainstay of the democratic process, and both are incomplete without women's full involvement (Byerly 2013). Despite strides towards gender equality in the media, Ghanaian women continue to be underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions within media outlets (Audrey Gadzekpo 2013). This challenge necessitates the need for research to be conducted to understand the strategies put in place to promote gender equity in media organisations.

While substantial research on this matter in recent times has been conducted in Asia (Zhi-Jin Zhong, Ruiyao Jiang, Sini Su and Shujin Lin 2022), North America (Autumn Lorimer Linford 2021), Australia (Louise North 2016) and Europe (Maria Joao Cunha and Rita Lúcio Martins 2023; Francisco Nunez-Roman, Gómez-Camacho Alejandro and Coral I Hunt-Gómez 2023), the few studies conducted within Africa were mainly situated in South Africa (Tarisai Nyamweda 2023), Burkina Faso (Schönbächler Viviane 2023) and Nigeria (Chinedu Jude Nwasum, Jude Ogbodo, Joseph N Chukwu and Sanita Ekwutosi Nwakpu 2023). Aside Audrey Gadzekpo's (2005) study on the history of gender in the Ghanaian media, recent Ghanaian-based studies have looked at the horizontal representation of

gender within the Ghanaian media (Yeboah-Banin, Fofie, and Sitsofe Gadzekpo 2024), gender representation in morning shows (Theodora Dame Adjin-Tettey, K. Asuman Manfred and Mary Selikem Ayim-Segbefia 2025) and the safety of female journalists practicing in Ghana's Rural and Peri-Urban Media (Adjin-Tettey, Asuman and Selikem ayim-Segbefia 2023). There is thus a dearth of empirical evidence on the vertical representation of gender within the Ghanaian broadcast media. The closely related study by Gadzekpo (2013) assessed "the occupational status of women in the Ghanaian news media" amid transformations in the Ghanaian media landscape due to democratization processes (371).

Furthermore, critiquing the "Third World woman as a singular monolithic subject" in feminist studies, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) argues that women's oppressions are varied, based on how class, ethnicity and race intersect. Mohanty, thus, advocates a transnational feminist praxis that is autonomous, geographically, historically, and culturally grounded, and is understood within the larger cross-national processes of the global economy (Mohanty 1991). Similarly, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) are also critical of "global feminism" for its dismissal of the diversity of women's agency and are for transnational feminisms that consider "scattered hegemonies." Their argument is predicated on the fact that the contemporary postmodern world is marked by neoliberal capitalist globalization, where power is no longer concentrated in one place but is scattered around the globe. Hence, the idea of a master theory in feminist studies that subsumes the varied experiences and conditions of women is not reflective of the realities. Therefore, it is imperative to compare the various, overlapping, and distinct forms of women's experiences (Ranjoo S Herr 2013), including challenges in the workplace. Consequently, as Ghanaian researchers with an interest in Ghana, we sought to ascertain how gender is vertically represented in the Ghanaian broadcast media. The study was guided by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1. How is gender represented in managerial positions in the Ghanaian broadcast media?

RQ2. How do institutional policies and context shape the vertical representation of gender in the Ghanaian broadcast media?

RQ3. What are the challenges faced by the underrepresented in managerial positions within the Ghanaian broadcast media?

RQ4. What strategies can be identified within the Ghanaian broadcast media that promote gender equity in managerial positions?

Conceptual framework

The study is grounded in the glass ceiling concept/metaphor. The term "glass ceiling" was popularized in the 1980s through a Wall Street Journal article authored by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt in 1986 (Alice H Eagly and Linda L Carli 2007). The concept highlights the idea that while higher positions available to women are within

their reach, they are often unable to break through the invisible barrier that keeps them in lower-level roles despite their qualifications, skills, and talents (Maria Florencia Amorelli Moreira 2023). Due to male dominance, men feel more capable than women; thus, gender discrimination adds to the glass ceiling (Shalini Srivastava, Madan Poomima and Vartika Dhawan Kapoor 2020). Risper Enid Kiaye and Anesh Manira (2013) contend that when men act disrespectfully and indifferently toward women's dual responsibilities, the perceived glass ceiling gets stronger.

The glass ceiling concept has broader implications for society, as it reflects the perpetuation of gender and cultural inequality. Consistent exclusion of certain groups from leadership positions reinforces stereotypes and limits the diversity of perspectives in decision-making processes. This can negatively impact organizational effectiveness and innovation and contribute to societal inequalities. Vijay Kumar Grover (2015, 2) highlights that "the most damaging effect of the glass ceiling is that women may perceive that they are worthless and non-contributing and their talent remains unutilized."

Three essential components of the glass ceiling concept were demonstrated in a study by Raewyn Connell (2006). First, women encounter bias, stereotyping, and discrimination in workplace settings. Second, there is a loss of ability to utilize women's skills and talents. Finally, for the glass ceiling to be broken, prejudice had to be eliminated and equal opportunities had to be enforced by both sexes. The glass ceiling concept is essential for this study because it provides a critical framework for examining the structural and systemic factors that contribute to gender disparities in managerial roles within the Ghanaian broadcast media. Further, it allowed us to go beyond surface-level observations and delve into the underlying barriers that perpetuate these disparities, ultimately guiding the identification of strategies to foster a more equitable and inclusive leadership landscape.

Methodology

Research approach

This study employed the qualitative research approach. This approach was opted for because there was little prior research on the phenomenon being studied (John Creswell 2014).

Sampling and sample size

The purposive sampling approach was used in this study because it matches "the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigor of the study and trustworthiness of the data and results" (Steve Campbell et al. 2020, 653). We selected the broadcast media because of their extensive reach to larger and more diverse audiences. Also, the ability to grab the viewer's attention makes it particularly effective in either reinforcing or challenging gender stereotypes (Zhe Kai 2023).

Sixteen participants who were in leadership positions and were actively practicing journalists for at least five years within the Greater Accra Region were purposively selected for the study. The researchers chose the Greater Accra Region because the region hosts top media stations in Ghana. The age of the participants ranged between

20 and 45 years (GeoPoll report 2024). Both males and females who were in management positions and fit the selection criteria were included in the study. This allowed us to investigate the phenomenon from both the experiential perspective and the perspective of the opposite gender, who may have observed the impediments that women face in the newsroom. Besides, they may know the strategies put in place to promote gender equity in managerial positions, which may not necessarily be initiated by women. The diverse range of participants was also meant to provide perspectives from within management and from those who aspire to or who have attempted to apply for management roles, and what they have observed and/or experienced. At the close of data collection, 12 participants were selected from those in leadership positions, while four participants were selected from actively practicing journalists. The sample size was considered adequate because theoretical saturation was reached at that point. This was in line with Clive Roland Boddy's (2016) assertion that 16 as a sample size is when data saturation occurs among a relatively homogeneous population. Also, borrowing insights from the PRICE model (Muhammad Naeem, Wilson Ozuem, Kerry Howell and Silvia Ranfagni 2024), the sample of 16 is justified because of perspectivation (it captured diverse views with redundancy), recapitulation (no new from insights emerged from data), integration (theoretical sufficiency), crystallisation (it afforded deeper engagements with data to ensure rich nuanced insights that emphasised multidimensional understanding) and edification (it permitted actionable findings without sacrificing rigour).

Data collection and ethical adherence

Guided by the literature and the research objectives of the study, the semi-structured interview guide was designed and used for data collection. The guide provided a flexible framework for the conduct of interviews (Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke 2019), allowing for follow-up questions. We chose interviews because they offer greater flexibility in convenient scheduling (Kim Ward, Merryn Gott and Karen Hoare 2015).

Interviews were conducted in English between April and May 2024, using phone and video conferencing where it was practical and available, and lasted 30 minutes on average. This mode makes participants feel more comfortable discussing sensitive topics compared to in-person, as it offers a degree of anonymity (Vincent M Lechuga 2012).

All interviewees were sent an information and consent form through e-mail. The project information sheet contained information regarding the aims of the study, background information, broad interview questions to be asked and processes for withdrawal from the study. Oral informed consent was also obtained from all participants before the interviews.

During interviews, efforts were made to minimize power dynamics, especially between the researcher and the participants. This was achieved by using conversational language, reassuring participants of the voluntary nature of the study, and assuring anonymity. To address any influence on the interpretation of findings, regular peer debriefing sessions, which involved scheduled meetings among the researchers, were held. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process to critically assess our personal biases and assumptions. We set aside a time to reflect on what we documented and identify areas for improvement, where some biases and misinterpretations were identified. The regular peer

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants.

Code assigned	Broadcast media	Type of manager	Gender
P1	Radio	Programs	Male
P2	Television	Chief editor	Female
P3	Television	Productions	Female
P4	Radio	Channel	Female
P5	Radio	Marketing	Male
P6	Television	Human resource	Male
P7	Radio	Programs	Female
P8	Radio	Human resource	Male
P9	Radio	Human resource	Male
P10	Radio	Productions	Male
P11	Television	Chief editor	Female
P12	Radio	Chief editor	Male
P13	Television	News presenter	Female
P14	Radio	Broadcast journalist	Female
P15	Television	Broadcast journalist	Female
P16	radio	News editor	Male

Source: Authors.

debriefing sessions by the researchers helped to ensure that participant voices were not overshadowed by the researchers' perspectives. This reflexive approach also enhanced the credibility and authenticity of the study by ensuring that findings were grounded in the participants' lived experiences rather than preconceived notions.

Assessing the credibility and dependability of data in qualitative research is essential (Kristina Mikkonen and Maria Kääriäinen 2020). To establish credibility, participants were encouraged to share their experiences openly. Although questions and follow-up questions varied depending on the direction of the conversations, the same thematic areas were covered in all the interviews to ensure dependability. Data collection and analysis were devoid of any personal biases. Table 1 (below) provides details of the participants who were interviewed:

Data analysis

The data obtained were analyzed using the data analysis method proposed by Kathy Charmaz (2014), which involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data simultaneously to identify different themes and their relationships. During this process, we performed three coding analyses—open coding, focused coding to detect patterns in the interviews, and axial coding. The findings of this study are entirely derived from the informants' responses based on their experiences and observations.

Findings

Before the findings are presented, Table 2 below provides a summary of the main themes identified.

RQ1: Gender representation in managerial positions within the selected broadcast media

Table 2. Summary of main findings.

RQs	Main findings
RQ1. How is gender represented in managerial positions in the Ghanaian broadcast media?	Gender representation in favor of males in top-management positions Gender representation in favor of males in mid-management positions Gender representation in favor of males in lower management positions
RQ2. How do institutional policies and context shape the vertical representation of gender in the Ghanaian broadcast media?	Lack of institutional policies in the Ghanaian broadcast media organisations. Need for institutional strategies towards ensuring gender equality. Programs specifically aimed at addressing gender inequalities, particularly in leadership.
RQ3. What are the challenges faced by the underrepresented in managerial positions within the Ghanaian broadcast media?	Women's leadership are under-recognized potentially limiting their career advancement opportunities within the media industry. Women are marginalized in leadership positions despite their qualifications. Minority voices struggle in majority decisions. Male ideas are usually taken during decision making. There are barriers to women's professional advancement. Leadership demands clash with home responsibilities of women.
RQ4. What strategies can be identified within the Ghanaian broadcast media that promote gender equity in managerial positions?	Equal representation of gender must be a requirement in promotions. Women should be given more opportunities to occupy high leadership positions. Qualified women deserve smooth media leadership access. People should be employed based on level of competencies. Employment should not be based on gender. Women should not be underrated. Mentorship programs, flexible working hours, and childcare facilities are crucial for women.

Despite notable progress in various sectors towards gender equality, the study reveals that participants in the selected Ghanaian broadcast media continue to exhibit significant gender inequality in managerial positions. The HR managers representing the selected media organisations provided data for gender representation in the three levels of management, which are detailed in Table 3. The data show a consistent gender gap across all managerial levels, with males outnumbering females. In top management, males were more than double the number of females. This trend existed in mid and lower management, where males held approximately 64% and 75% of roles, respectively. Overall, females remained underrepresented at all leadership levels, especially in top and lower management.

Table 3. Representation of leaders in the selected media organizations.

Level of managerial position	Number of males N (%)	Number of females N (%)	Total N (%)
Top management	36 (68%)	17 (32%)	53 (100%)
Mid management	29 (64%)	16 (36%)	45 (100%)
Lower management	59 (75%)	20 (25%)	79 (100%)

Source: Interview data.

Several participants revealed the existence of gender disparity in managerial positions within the Ghanaian broadcast media, with men overwhelmingly outnumbering women in leadership roles. This shows that women occupy a noticeably smaller fraction of these influential positions. The findings of the study further indicate that men hold a substantial majority of managerial positions such as editors-in-chief, news directors and senior executives. Women, conversely, occupy a noticeably smaller fraction of these roles, as reflected in a comment:

We have a team of five directors, comprising four men and one woman: the General Manager, Marketing Manager, Production Manager, Finance Manager and Human Resource Manager. The marketing manager is a female (P7).

This gender imbalance is reflective of trends and structural challenges that hinder women's advancement to leadership positions in the selected broadcast organisations. P5 indicated that in terms of top managerial positions, women who occupy them only serve as acting managers.

In my media organization, we have four Directors consisting of a General Manager, Human Resources, Administration, and Corporate Affairs. The only woman who exercises oversight responsibility is the Acting Director of Corporate Affairs.

As evidenced by the following response, some participants stated that there is no female representation in leadership roles within their organisation, which makes it difficult to showcase the ideas, experiences, and leadership abilities that women have to offer:

When it comes to gender representation in my organization, it's not quite satisfactory. Among the top managers, there is no woman. This shows how gender biased we are as an organization (P2).

The participant (P2) highlighted that women in top management positions can positively influence organizational culture by fostering inclusivity, collaboration and innovation. This assertion suggests that the absence of women from leadership roles in her organisation may perpetuate a male-dominated culture that marginalizes female employees and limits their opportunities for advancement. This study is on the premise that female representation in top management provides valuable role models and mentors for aspiring women leaders within the organization. Therefore, when women are absent from leadership roles, it deprives junior female employees in the selected organisations of access to guidance, support, and opportunities for advancement.

RQ2: *Institutional policies that shape vertical representation within the selected broadcast media*

Gender-balanced representation ensures that both men and women have equal access to leadership roles and decision-making processes, thereby challenging gender hierarchies and promoting equity at all levels. Gender representation policies ensure that media leadership and decision-making accurately reflect the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of both genders. This creates a more inclusive media environment that resonates with diverse audiences, fostering a culture of equality and representation.

However, findings revealed that formal institutional policies on gender representation were non-existent, though a few of the selected organisations had informal means of ensuring gender representation. For instance, P3 notes that:

Even though institutional policies on gender guard the operations of an organization to ensure that no gender is left behind, there is no policy as such in my media firm. I haven't seen one in all these years that I've worked as a production manager (P3).

Without clear guidelines and frameworks in place, there may be limited accountability mechanisms to ensure that gender disparities are effectively identified and addressed. This absence of institutional policies can perpetuate existing gender inequalities within the selected organisations, including disparities in representation and opportunities for advancement.

Though all the participants indicated that there are no formalized policies specifically designed to address gender equality within their media organizations, a participant indicated that his media station has their way of ensuring that both genders are represented fairly.

In terms of policy direction, I will say no. But as I said earlier, we have a kind of system that we operate that is geared toward gender equality. This system helps everybody to have an equal opportunity to come out with their best (P14).

However, without clear guidelines and frameworks in place, there may be limited accountability mechanisms to ensure that gender disparities are effectively identified and addressed in his organisation. This observation underscores a crucial issue that warrants attention within the selected broadcast media organisations in particular and the Ghanaian broadcast industry in general. Some participants indicated that despite the absence of formal institutional policies, their organisations have programs geared towards promoting issues of gender. A participant said that:

We might not have a written policy, but we've created programs specifically aimed at addressing gender inequalities, particularly in leadership. We focus on highlighting successful women in top-tier positions, both in the media and other sectors, to encourage and empower more women to seek leadership opportunities (P16).

RQ3: *Challenges faced by women in managerial positions*

The findings of the study highlight that the absence of formal policies in the organisations creates environments where women are bedevilled with challenges that hinder their progression and aspirations to leadership positions. This carries several implications that underscore broader issues of under-recognition and underutilization of leadership capabilities of women in the selected organisations, which promote marginalization of women so far as vertical representations within the organizations are concerned.

A challenge outlined is that despite possessing the necessary skills, experience, and qualifications, some women find themselves consistently overlooked for promotions to senior leadership roles, thereby limiting their career advancement opportunities. P11 said that: *"This persistent under-recognition of women's leadership potential limits our career advancement opportunities within the media industry."* Another

participant whose view resonates with the above highlighted that women face unfair treatment:

Sometimes we feel like we have been left alone. When we consider our qualifications as compared to those of men, we are supposed to be in a top management position. However, it happens the other way around. So, we feel like what we went to study, with all our certificates, we can't even get to the better position that we deserve (P9).

Similarly, the findings of the study point to the under-recognition and underutilization of women's leadership potential, which manifests in various forms, including limited access to opportunities, stereotypes and bias, leading to marginalization of women in the organisations. This contributes to barriers that inhibit their access to and advancement in leadership positions within their organizations, as P10 aptly said: *"Marginalization presents a multifaceted challenge to women's underrepresentation in my organization and within the Ghanaian media industry."*

Some participants indicated that women's underrepresentation in top leadership positions within media organizations limits their opportunities to participate in decision-making processes at strategic levels. They also have less influence over organizational policies, priorities, and resource allocation, further perpetuating their underrepresentation and marginalisation within their organisations. A participant revealed that:

If you are in the minority, it's always difficult when it comes to decision-making and voting because the majority carries the day. You can have brilliant ideas, but it can be challenging for your voice to be heard (P15).

P1, whose view is reflective of the above response also highlighted that: *"Most of the time, when we vote at the management level, since males are in the majority, their ideas and opinions are those usually taken and implemented."*

The underutilization and underrepresentation of women in media organizations and decision-making processes can erode trust and credibility in the media institutions. When women's voices are excluded from decisions that shape media content, female audiences may perceive the industry as out of touch or unresponsive to their needs and interests. This can contribute to skepticism and disengagement among audiences, undermining the media's role as a trusted source of information.

Further, the underrepresentation, underutilization and marginalisation of women from leadership positions in the selected organisations have connections with anti-gender traditional and cultural norms. In many Ghanaian societies, these traditional and cultural norms are deeply entrenched and can influence various aspects of life, including education and career choices and progression to leadership positions. A participant indicated that this has direct consequences on the ability of women to boldly take up leadership opportunities:

This disparity in educational opportunities means that women may not have the same qualifications as men for higher-level positions later in life. It creates a significant barrier to their professional advancement and limits their chances of taking leadership roles (P12).

Some participants also noted that traditional gender roles often assign women the primary responsibility for household duties and caregiving. This expectation limits women's availability and time to pursue demanding careers and leadership

positions. The long hours and high levels of commitment requirements, as highlighted by a study P11, affect some career choices women in the organizations make:

Leadership positions usually require long hours and sometimes even travel. When we are already tired of household responsibilities, it becomes incredibly challenging for us to meet these demands. As a result, we might not even consider applying for such roles [leadership/management], or if we do, we struggle to balance both work and home, often leading to burnout.

The foregoing may explain the findings in Table 3, where consistent male dominance across all levels of management is seen. Moreover, the traditional and cultural norms propagate stereotypical orientations that portray men as better and capable leaders than women. P6 succinctly captured this when he said: *"These stereotypes may be based on perceived emotionality, physical appearance, or suitability for leadership roles, leading to bias in hiring and promotion practices within organizations."*

RQ4: Strategies identified within the selected broadcast media organisations that promote gender equity

The findings of the study revealed three main strategies that can be used to promote gender equity among the underrepresented (women) within the selected broadcast media: promoting gender equity and diversity in leadership, employing and promoting based on competencies, and providing incentives and support for hardworking individuals.

Several participants stressed that promoting gender equity and diversity in leadership positions helps challenge existing biases and stereotypes within their organisation. When promoted to leadership positions, women can advocate for more inclusive practices and policies, ensuring that content creation and organizational culture are free from discriminatory practices. Some participants highlighted that there should be a fair representation of gender at all levels, especially ensuring that women are allowed to take up leadership roles. For instance, P1 stressed that:

It is not only about making sure both genders are represented. It should be a requirement so that the other gender does not overtake or discriminate, or look down on the other. So, measures should be put in place to ensure that females are not discriminated against.

However, another participant reiterated that the underrepresented [women], considering the potential that they exhibit, contribute to increased productivity when given the chance to explore their ideas. To this, P6 noted that: *"When you work with women, you often feel more comfortable than the men. Women provide exposure and chance for self-expression."*

Additionally, some participants believe that issues of bias should be avoided when appointing people to leadership positions. Women should be allowed to take leadership positions without struggle, a view supported by P3:

We should allow women to lead without going through hardship. When it comes to electing the next person or giving promotions, it shouldn't be skewed towards men alone. It should be based on qualification and one's ability to do the work. If a woman fits the job, so be it (P3).

When these strategies are implemented in the selected media organisations, it will help achieve fairness, enhance organizational performance, and foster innovation. It will also help to ensure that the media organizations are better aligned with their audiences, are more resilient and effective in their mission to inform, educate, and entertain.

Several participants highlighted that employing people based on competencies is crucial for creating a fair, effective, and thriving workplace. This approach ensures that the best candidates are chosen for roles based on their skills, experience, and potential, rather than on irrelevant or discriminatory criteria. Some participants commented as follows:

I think people should be employed in media organizations based on their level of competence. It's not about a man's or a woman's issue here. It's about what you can do. I believe this will help more women to be employed and subsequently take up leadership positions (P8).

Who I employ are people who are resilient and hardworking. People who can do the work. So if a particular gender feels confident, can represent or, can host a show, I will hire that person and promote him/her based on hard work (P1).

Another participant said that women possess unique strengths that make them effective and impactful leaders. These strengths are not only beneficial to organizations but also crucial for fostering inclusive and innovative environments. Women tend to adopt a more collaborative and participatory leadership style. They value input from others and encourage team members to contribute ideas and solutions. This inclusive approach not only empowers employees but also harnesses the collective intelligence of the team, leading to more innovative and well-rounded decision-making. P2 said that:

Certain contributions, suggestions and opinions of women are essential for the organization. We do not underrate their effort in terms of productivity, skills and competence. I think as an organization, we should give more opportunities for women to take up leadership positions.

Other participants argued that recognizing and rewarding effort and achievement, regardless of gender, creates a level playing field. This approach can help to break down systemic barriers that often disadvantage women and other marginalized groups. They indicated that providing incentives such as bonuses, promotions, and professional development opportunities can motivate individuals to excel. These measures not only promote fairness but also ensure that all employees have the resources they need to succeed. By focusing on merit and providing the necessary support, organizations can foster a more inclusive and equitable work environment. This, in turn, leads to greater diversity in leadership and a more dynamic, innovative workforce. P 11 said:

Support mechanisms such as mentorship programs, flexible working hours, and childcare facilities are crucial, especially for women. These resources help to address some of the challenges that women face in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities.

Discussion

The study's findings established slow progression of women in the prevailing state of vertical gender representation in the selected media organizations due to dominance of males at the top, mid and lower management levels. It showed that existing cultural norms and traditional roles turn the requirements of long hours and high commitment

that characterise leadership positions into a workplace culture that favours males over females in the selected media organizations. This aligns with the structural barrier aspect of the glass ceiling concept. Thus, such workplace culture builds invisible but systematic and structural barriers that not only support male dominance in leadership positions (Srivastava, Poomima, and Dhawan Kapoor 2020) but also perpetuate gender discrimination and add to the glass ceiling effects in the organizations (Alison Cook and Christy Glass 2014). Also, it subtly and unconsciously reinforces attributes associated with traditional leadership stereotypes like that men are more assertive and perform better at leadership positions than women. This creates a situation where women in the selected media organizations see higher positions available to them, yet often find themselves unable to break through these invisible barriers that keep them in lower-level roles despite their qualifications, skills and talents (Moreira 2023).

Besides, this finding resonates with Cunha and Lúcio Martins's (2023) study that examined the challenges and constraints that women face when advancing to top leadership positions in the Portuguese press. They found that women still represent a minority in leadership positions within the media. Similarly, Monika Djerf-Pierre and Maria Edström (2020) established that there is a lack of women in leadership in the top 100 international media corporations in Germany. Only six of the 100 corporations had women as chief executive officers. Our findings affirm slow progression in the prevailing state of vertical gender representation in the media despite numerous global efforts for gender equity and equality and advocacy through research, such as Gadzekpo (2013), Deloitte Report (2019), Global Media Monitoring Project (2010, 2015, 2020).

The study also reveals that despite the importance of gender-balanced representation in the media, there are no institutional policies that focus exclusively on gender representation within the Ghanaian broadcast media. All 16 participants noted the absence of formal policy guidelines, which limits accountability for addressing gender disparities. Besides, there were a few instances of informal systems and programmes to ensure fair gender representation. Based on the findings of male dominance in RQ1, it can be argued that these organisations are characterised by homogeneous leadership. However, homogeneous leadership often tends to reproduce existing power dynamics in organisations (Simon de Jong and Heike Bruch 2024) because it causes men to act indifferently toward women's dual responsibilities, thereby entrenching the glass ceiling (Kiaye and Manira 2013). The prevailing leadership in the organisations also misses out on diverse standpoints needed to drive formal institutional policies that are gender-friendly to shape vertical representations in the organizations. This lack of diversity can negatively impact organizational effectiveness and innovation, as well as contribute to inequalities in the selected media organizations.

Making institutional policy on gender representation a prerequisite and binding can help bridge the gender gap (Antoine Rebérioux and Gwenaél Roudaut 2019). The evidence of near-stagnant progression and the male-dominated vertical representation in the selected media organizations calls for profound and intentional efforts to address the problem. Such policies come with the consciousness that addresses the unconscious neglect of vertical representations in the media. Thus, such obligatory policies would consciously address gender socializations that unconsciously normalize and undermine the representation of women in managerial and leadership positions in the media. Besides, having gender policies alone is insufficient, but monitoring and evaluation to

facilitate a policy review process may help improve the situation (Reni Auma Ojwala, Momoko Kitada, Francis Neat and Susan Buckingham 2022). Despite these views, policy guidelines on gender are important, especially in the context of our study, because they provide the basis for the underrepresented to challenge the prevailing glass ceiling status quo, demand accountability and set precedents that foster true inclusivity and equality in the media industry.

Further, the study found that women in the selected organisations faced challenges of underrepresentation, underutilization and marginalization from the decision-making process despite their qualifications. The reinforcement of the stereotype tenet of the glass ceiling concept argues that homogeneous leadership validates the wrong notion that the underrepresented or marginalized group does not qualify for power roles/leadership positions. This causes them to feel that they do not belong or fit in the organization, as was the case with P9, who reported the feeling of being left alone, and/or lead to role scarcity. It also highlights the assertion by Grover (2015) that “the most damaging effect of the glass ceiling is that women may perceive that they are worthless and non-contributing and their talent remains unutilized” (p. 2). The foregoing justifies our argument for profound and intentional efforts to challenge the prevailing status quo. Thus, we further argue that an obligatory diversity quota or gender parity targets in top, mid and lower levels of management are needed in the selected organizations to break the ceiling. This argument is in line with Rebérioux and Roudaut’s (2019) assertion that mandatory gender quotas at management levels have successfully increased female-friendly vertical representation in organizations.

In addition, the finding establishes the compounding effect of intersectionality on the glass ceiling in the selected media organizations. It shows how women in the organizations are facing a myriad of marginalizations and discriminations due to their overlapping social identities—gender, marital status and location—intersecting with systems of power and privileges. It can be argued that the marginalization and discrimination of women in the organizations experience are structural and systemic. As our study found, they are embedded in the institutional and cultural norms, so discrimination against women in the organization involves both gender biases in promotion practices and stereotypes from cultural and traditional norms in Ghanaian society.

Also, multiple identities (sexism, marital status and being in a patriarchal society) intersect to shape women’s experiences of discrimination, depending on the prevailing context—marital or motherhood statuses—interact in complex ways to manifest discrimination. Thus, the extent of discrimination and marginalization against a woman who is single and without a child will vary from that of a woman who is a single parent or married with or without children. In addition, dominant narratives from homogenous group (male) dominance in the organizations overlook the qualifications, skills and talents of females/marginalized (female) group.

This study reveals three main strategies that could promote gender equality within the selected broadcast media: promoting gender equity and diversity in leadership, employment and promotions based on competencies and providing incentives and support for hardworking individuals. These themes outline three important key ingredients needed to challenge the glass ceiling: policy intervention, cultural shift and individual mentorship.

Advocacy for more inclusive policies and practices to promote gender equality will clearly and intentionally bring mandatory gender-friendly structures into existence to

tackle the prevailing invisible but systematic and structural gender barriers. This will reverse the prevailing homogenous leadership in the organisation and bring about the needed diversity in leadership positions. It will also ensure shifts in the workplace culture that will destabilize the underrepresentation, underutilization and marginalization of women and bring about equitable promotions to leadership positions based on competencies. This will cause women in the organizations not only to see higher positions available to them but also to be able to break through the ceiling. Also, flexible working hours and childcare facilities that can help balance professional and personal responsibilities of women in the selected organizations are needed to enable them to juggle the dual and demanding responsibilities that come with the profession and the cultural/traditional norms. In support of the above findings, Sirisha Narayana, Brita Roy Sarah Merriam, Emmanuelle Yecies, Rita S. Lee, Julie L. Mitchell, Amy S. Gottlieb and Society of General Internal Medicine's Women and Medicine Commission (Sirisha Narayana et al. 2020) also offer similar strategies as providing incentives such as base pay increases and leadership stipends with an eye toward equity and eligibility.

Most importantly, our study findings affirm the three essential components of the glass ceiling concept demonstrated by Connell (2006). Firstly, our findings revealed that women in the selected media organizations encounter bias, stereotyping, and discrimination in workplace settings. Again, there is a loss of ability to utilize women's skills and talents due to replication of existing power dynamics by the homogenous leadership. Finally, the glass ceiling requires structural change in the selected organizations because it is more of a systemic issue than individual/women struggles. Hence, for the glass ceiling to be broken, prejudice against women in the selected media organizations had to be eliminated via the implementation and enforcement of formal institutional policies that shift prevailing workplace culture and support gender equity/equality.

However, consideration should be given to the outcomes of the compounding effects of intersectionality on the glass ceiling when outlining policies and guidelines to promote gender equity and equality in organizations. This will ensure that they address the specific needs emanating from women's multiple and overlapping identities in the selected media organizations. These will result in the existence of equal opportunities accessible to both sexes in the selected media organizations.

Conclusions, limitations, and future research

The findings from this study affirm and add to the current and ongoing discourse on promoting gender equality in the Ghanaian broadcast media. The study suggests promoting gender equity and diversity in leadership, ensuring employment and promotions based on competencies rather than gender, and providing incentives and support, such as mentorship programs, flexible working hours, and childcare facilities, as key strategies in promoting gender equality within the Ghanaian broadcast media. Implementing these strategies, with accountability and enforcement mechanisms in place, can create a more inclusive and dynamic work environment, fostering innovation and enhancing organizational performance.

The scope of this study is limited because of the reliance on a small sample size. However, qualitative studies are not about large numbers but are concerned with garnering an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Also, the effort to include males and HR

managers provided perspectives that would not have been released by engaging females and journalists alone.

Additionally, the study's focus on broadcast media alone did not give a fair representation of how gender is represented within the Ghanaian media. Nonetheless, these limitations do not take away the credibility of the study. Future studies could explore the design and implementation of formal gender policies in media organizations (where available) across different levels. Additionally, a comparative study is required to explore how gender is vertically and horizontally represented in media organizations.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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