

Women Empowerment Policies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Other GCC Countries: A Systematic Review

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Abstract:

Recent reports suggest that policymakers and practitioners of women's empowerment the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is planning to give more opportunities for women by 2030, which includes the leadership positions in the public and private sectors. The role of religion in hindering the women's empowerment in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries is an extensively researched topic, KSA being the center of attention. However, the Islamic Shariah and its implications are highly influenced by the socio-cultural norms, which is evident from the huge differences in women's empowerment within the GCC countries. By giving too much importance to the role of religion, many of the earlier studies failed discuss the role of historic, social and cultural factors in deterring the women's empowerment in the GCC countries. Further, opportunity for the women to lead is also an important criterion when the extent of empowerment is evaluated. Therefore, the present study evaluated the role of governmental policies and factors other than religion in shaping the women's empowerment in the KSA and other GCC countries. Further, we checked to what extend women adorn the leadership positions in the government sectors of KSA and other GCC countries. In this study, we conducted a systematic literature review of articles published after 2005 on the women's empowerment to assess the current scenario. The analysis followed a qualitative route – thematic analysis method was used to represent the different areas of concern, including the socio-cultural, economic factors as well as issues related to women-in-leadership. We found that women in KSA and other GCC countries are still facing inequality and discrimination in the recruitment and appointment processes. Factors that may act as hurdles for women to attain leadership position in higher education include personal, cultural, and organizational barriers. However, recent reports indicate that the perceptions of people living in the GCC regions is also changing and policy makers are becoming increasingly aware about the need for women's empowerment. We suggest gender-specific training programs and affirmation in recruitment for the females. Training programs can play an essential role in polishing the professional capabilities and can boost the value of females in the labor market. Consequently, women's empowerment in the GCC countries can be boosted and improved female representation in the leadership can be achieved.

Keywords: Women's empowerment; Leadership; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; GCC countries; Saudi Vision 2030.

1. Introduction

Women of the present era have the potential to play crucial roles in addressing the social challenges and thereby influences economic reforms (Lieu et al., 2020; Dahlum, Knutsen & Mechkova, 2022). Lukova (2021) regarded women's empowerment and women-in-leadership as two key elements of a successful society. This changing paradigm of women's empowerment has compelled various governments to amend their policies, so as to provide equal opportunities to women. The scenario is the same in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, where the governments do not recognize women as per their capabilities (Topal, 2019). Studies have extensively discussed the trends, interesting concepts, strategies, and possible outcomes concerning the inadequacy of women's empowerment and leadership in the GCC countries; KSA being the center of attention (Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010; Al-bakr et al., 2017; Capello & Borisly, 2019; Topal, 2019).

Researchers have agreed upon the fact that improving the political, cultural, educational, and socioeconomic power of women is essential in the public sectors in GCC countries (Metcalf, 2011; Al Khayyal et al., 2020; Abousleiman, 2020). However, researchers vary in their opinion with regards to the factors that may influence the women's empowerment. For instance, women's limited career development and the potential involvement of religious norms in the GCC countries was discussed by many researchers (Mobaraki & Söderfeldt, 2010; Madsen, Kemp, & Davis, 2014; Alomair, 2015). However, Al Khayyal et al., (2020) argue that the aforementioned points are primarily based on cultural processes in the GCC that assume a woman would marry young and contribute to the household as a housewife, and not exclusive to Islam.

From past experiences, KSA is considered as the most restricted Islamic country in which women are not designed to work (Alsharif, 2019; Habibi, 2019). However, the Saudi government has done vital efforts to bring equality to men and women so that both can play a significant role in economic growth (Eum, 2019; Al-Qahtani et al., 2020). One of the plans presented by KSA considering all these concerns is the Saudi Vision 2030 (Habibi, 2019; Alhazmi & Kamarudin, 2021). The government of Saudi Arabia has presented the Saudi Vision 2030 to minimize the dependency of the economy of Saudi Arabia on oil, expand its economy and establish and improve the public service sectors such as tourism, health, infrastructure, education, and recreation (Soliman & Al Rubaie, 2019). Other GCC countries like the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman and Bahrain have also introduced new rules and regulations to provide equal opportunities to women in social and economic departments. However, the socio-cultural complexities function as the major factor that limit women's participation in business ventures, women's leadership, and finally, women's encouragement for empowerment in the GCC (Goby & Eroglu, 2011; Majumdar & Varadarajan, 2013; Miller, Kyriazi & Paris, 2017; Dauletova, Hassan & Zainab, 2022).

Al-Mukhled & Al-Bader (2021) have clearly showed that the women's participation in the public sectors of GCC countries vary extensively: 66% in the UAE to just 28% in Qatar. The representation of women in the governing bodies and public councils also vary widely among the GCC countries. These variations among the countries, all of

which are ruled by the Islamic Shariah, indicates the involvement of the socio-economic as well as policy-related factors in modulating the women empowerment in these countries. It is suggested that the differences in the socio-cultural background of GCC countries can act as a decisive factor for the type and extent of women's empowerment (Metcalf et al., 2009; Metcalf, 2011). Therefore, the present study aims to evaluate these factors rather than paying attention to the role of religion. Since Saudi Vision 2030 can be regarded as the most revolutionary policy change in women empowerment the region, the present study also aims to discuss its influence on the women's empowerment in KSA.

2. Objectives

As discussed above, many recent studies have reported substantial improvements in the women's empowerment in the GCC countries, especially in KSA. This change in governmental policies toward the women's empowerment in the KSA is evident from the Saudi Vision 2030. However, there is a lack of studies regarding the effectiveness of these policy changes in realizing women's empowerment in the GCC. Further, the role of socio-cultural and economic factors in shaping the women's empowerment policies and in impeding the representation of 'women as leaders' remains unexplored. Therefore, this paper aims to address this knowledge gap. Consequently, the following objectives are covered in this paper:

1. To examine the factors involved in the impediment of women's leadership and empowerment in the KSA and other GCC countries.
2. To examine whether the changes in socio-cultural and economic norms have resulted in an improvement of women's empowerment and leadership in KSA and other GCC countries.
3. To analyze the measures addressed in Saudi Vision 2030 in the light of women's empowerment in KSA and other GCC countries.

3. Methodology

The primary aim of the systematic review is to address the following research questions: "What measures have been implemented in the government organizations of Saudi Arabia and GCC countries to increase their level of women empowerment and leadership?" and "whether the aforementioned measures taken by the GCC authorities are adequate in realizing women's empowerment in the area?"

To achieve the objectives of this study and to address the research questions, the following methods were adopted.

3.1. Study Design and Literature Search Strategy

This article followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Liberati et al., 2009). In addition, this paper has taken the valuable tips provided by Khan et al., (2003) and Vizheh et al., (2021), for conducting the systematic literature review. The data collection was through manual searching process in various data sources. Research papers, articles, books and conference papers and reports published from 2005 to 2022 were collected, that are related to women empowerment and leadership. A keyword search strategy has been

adopted for the data searching process as described by Neilson (2021). To conduct this systematic literature review, the researchers used the following keywords: Women's empowerment, leadership, Saudi Arabia/KSA, GCC countries, and Saudi Vision 2030.

3.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

It was noticed that considerable changes in women's empowerment have occurred in the GCC countries after 2005 (Al-Mukhled & Al-Bader, 2021; Parveen, 2022). Hence, peer-reviewed articles published between 2005 and 2022 were included. All the published peer-reviewed works during the key words search were collected during the initial search and then subjected to strict scrutiny during subsequent steps. The exclusions criteria are: 1) Publications with subject areas not within the research aim of this study; 2) non-peer reviewed articles (i.e., data from the informal sources such as: Wikipedia, Bing, Yahoo, etc.); 3) non-English articles; 4) lack of availability for external referencing (private items, library does not have the facility for external referencing, etc.); and 5) articles published before the year 2005. The PRISMA chart for the article selection process is given below (Figure 1).

3.3. Quality Assessment

A quality assessment of the selected studies has been performed to fulfill the research objectives. The study adopted the quality assessment from the research of Costal et al. (2021). Below are the criteria defined for the quality assessment of the selected papers.

QA1: The inclusion and exclusion criteria are followed.

QA2: The literature searches cover all the relevant studies.

QA3: Reviewers have ensured the integrated studies' reliability, validity, and quality.

QA4: The basic information was adequately defined.

- QA1: Y (Yes), a clear definition of the inclusion criteria has been addressed, and P (Partly) the inclusion criteria was also described. Moreover, N (No) cannot infer the inclusion criteria readily.
- QA2: Y (Yes), various databases were used for the data collection process and different search strategies. P (Partly), but they did not utilize all the stated databases accordingly. Moreover, N (No), Google Scholar, PubMed, and ScienceDirect were used for the data searching process.
- QA3: Y (Yes), the authors defined the quality criteria, and the data was extracted accordingly from the selected papers. P (Partly), the study addressed the research question accordingly, and N (No) performed quality assessment within the primary studies.
- QA4: Y (Yes), all the required information was present in the selected papers. P (Partly), the summary of primary information was present in the selected studies. N (No), no such specification of the primary results was present.

3.4. Data Collection

The articles are screened out to finalize the most related articles according to women empowerment and leadership. The initial search result of Google Scholar, PubMed,

ScienceDirect, University/Public Library, etc. was 14,400. These articles were further screened as per the set criteria described above, and finally selected 18 articles for conducting the systematic review (Figure 1). A brief summary of the selected 18 articles is given in Appendix 1.

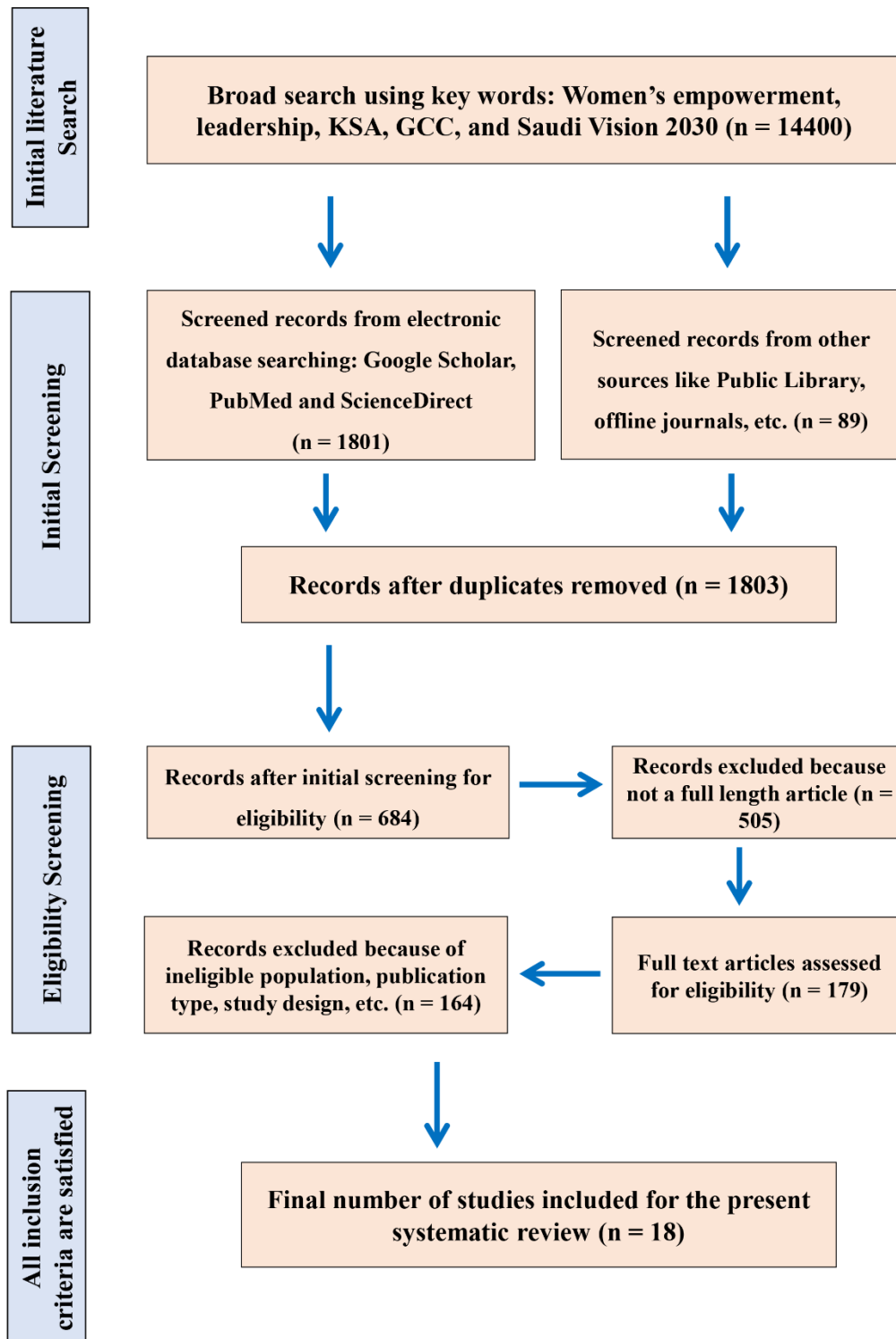


Figure 1: PRISMA chart depicting the steps involved in the selection of articles for the systematic review.

3.5.Data Analysis

Since the aim was to conduct a qualitative analysis, this systematic review followed the thematic analysis method for assessing the data. Each article is read repeatedly to scan the categories related to the objectives of this systematic review. Two researchers independently assessed the data to avoid personal bias. During the first reading, the ideas and relationships were noted, which were formed in to themes during the subsequent reads and analysis.

3.6.Ethical Implication

A reference for every study is provided to avoid ethical violations in this study. Any published content in this study is given proper credit to avoid plagiarism. All the ethical guidelines for conducting the research are followed. None of the copyrights is violated, and approval is taken from the university authorities to conduct this study.

4. Results

The themes formed through the present systematic literature review are given below. The summary of the findings is provided as a systematic literature review table (Appendix 2).

4.1.Importance of Women's Empowerment and Leadership

The most notable theme of this study is the role of women's empowerment and leadership in KSA's economic development. A commendable study by Alotaibi (2020) highlighted the chances of 'performance gap' in KSA, due to the inadequacy of female labor force involvement. It is identified that the leadership positions for women in higher education are limited, which acts as a hurdle to their empowerment. The factors that may act as hurdles for women to attain leadership positions in higher education in KSA include personal, cultural, and organizational barriers (Alotaibi, 2020). The study by Alotaibi, Cutting and Morgan (2017) has previously discussed similar aspects of women's leadership in KSA. Moreover, Samier and Tok (2021) argues that there are contextual factors, which may directly affect women's leadership in KSA.

The study by Alsubaie and Jones (2017) evaluated the present state of women leaders in higher education in KSA. The findings of this study are disturbing: though higher education is one of the few careers open to women, most of them serve at lower positions in this arena. Not many are at the leadership positions. This scenario was primarily due to the traditional gender hierarchies in KSA and patriarchal organisational structures. The study by Allison (2021) supports the above findings. This study assessed issues of Saudi females and hurdles for women to attain leadership positions, in higher education institutions in KSA. Results showed that Saudi women experienced insubordination, disrespect, and working issues in the public sectors. The main hurdle for leadership is the lack of support from management. Though the sample size of this study is small, this study pinpoints the issues related to gender discrimination in the higher education institutes in GCC and KSA.

The significance of training in empowering women leaders was highlighted in a recent study (Alasgah and Alshammari, 2021). The authors made a comparative study between the universities of KSA and the United Kingdom (UK). The results suggested

that training can play an essential role in polishing professional capabilities of women, thereby encouraging their participation in the labor market. The authors concluded that lack of adequate training programs in the KSA may be one reason why women lag behind men in KSA.

The study by Kattan et al., (2016) assessed the factors which promote success in the foremost companies; particularly success of the females. The proposed hypothesis in this study is "the more woman has factors of leadership, the more success she may achieve in leading organizations." The main factors assessed were experience, Knowledge, skills, culture, and support from the society. Though this study failed to prove the proposed hypothesis, they found a significant relationship between training, experience and knowledge. Notably, they did not find a positive role of experience in success. Though the aforementioned studies primarily show gender discrimination and lack of women's empowerment, KSA has the fastest female labor force participation rate among all G20 countries. Also, there is a chance of improvement due to changes in policies as per the Saudi vision 2030.

4.2.Changes in Social Norms

Another important theme that evolved in the present study is the changes in social norms. For instance, the systematic review by Yusuf & Abdulmohsen (2021) has evaluated the influence of women's empowerment and the online education system in KSA. It was noted that the KSA government had adopted a technology-driven approach to providing quality education and encouraged women to work as leaders in the education system. This study is an indicator of how the Saudi Vision 2030 is influencing the policy makers to implement women empowerment programs in KSA. Though the scenario in KSA is slowly improving, the study of Al Gharaibeh (2011) conducted in another GCC country (Bahrain) reports contradicting results. They reported that in Bahrain, women are not valued, and women's empowerment is degraded within the country. A study by Sinha (2020) affirmed the discrimination faced by women in Bahrain. Women working in the financial sector in Bahrain are facing serious discrimination. Senior prestigious positions in the institutions are filled not on the basis of merit, but were based on relationship and patronage. The cultural barriers make the scenario worse in the Bahrain. Consequently, women representation in higher positions is minimum. These variations between KSA and Bahrain pinpoints our viewpoint: religion is NOT the only factor involved in deciding the women empowerment.

Abalkhail (2019) conducted a study to evaluate the perspectives of women regarding their strategy of gaining the position of a senior leader in the GCC countries. Interestingly, this study demonstrated the means by which women in KSA higher education sector overcome the patriarchal power structures for negotiating their position. It is expected that women in other GCC countries will get inspired and follow these footprints to overcome gender-related issues in their country. Alkhaled & Berglund (2018) narrated the life stories of the women entrepreneurs in KSA and Sweden. This study highlights the challenges and opportunities that the women leaders faced during their journey of entrepreneurship. The participants reported that they have faced several hurdles, such as criticism; but many organizations and their government even supported them, which eventually led them to success. The importance of this

study is that stories of these leaders can inspire and motivate other women to follow the same path.

4.3.Saudi Vision 2030 and Women Empowerment

A study by Elsayed & Elmulthum (2017) reported a huge mismatch with regards to the women in labor force. The males represent majority of working force and industries are not considering the increased availability of female graduates. Though the number of females in the teaching field has increased as compared to the previous years, male teachers are majority and holds most of the higher positions. This study argues for better strategies to meet the goals of the 2030 Saudi Vision. However, this study was conducted when the Saudi Vision 2030 was just launched in 2016. The picture has changed since then.

The importance of the Saudi Vision (2030) implementation is that, women are getting better support from the policy makers and perceptions towards women working in the community and commercial markets are slowly becoming positive. The aforementioned scenario is evident from the study of Sabir & Zenaidi (2019). This study showed that 40% of the participants supported the women's work in the commercial market. Similarly, Saleh & Malibari (2021) evaluated how the Saudi Vision 2030 has changed the Saudi female's decision-making power during traveling. Prior to 2018, the Saudi females were not allowed to drive. This study reports that once the KSA women are allowed to drive, their employability have increased considerably because previously they have to employ a driver for traveling, which acted as a barrier for their travel and hence employability. Now, many of them prefer to drive own car and hence travel restrictions are non-existent for most of them.

Through a commendable effort, Alsufyan et al. (2020) highlighted the challenges in reaching "The Gold Standard" in nursing practices in KSA. This study suggests that the present nursing practices and policies are inadequate in attaining the golden standards for health care. There is a need for policies based on current challenges, identification of potential options and alternatives, involvement of stakeholders, and proper implementation to transform nursing standards as per the Saudi Vision 2030.

Afzal & Omar (2021) assessed how the KSA press is highlighting and circulating the themes of Saudi Vision 2030 related to the women's empowerment. After analyzing 1578 newspaper articles, reports, stories, and editorials from Arab News and Saudi Gazettes, the authors concluded that the newspapers in the KSA are sincerely supporting and reproducing the efforts and policies of the Saudi Vision 2030. These efforts may be the reason for the slow pro-women changes in the perceptions of Saudi males regarding the employability and women's empowerment in KSA.

4.4.Women Leadership and Empowerment in the Government Sectors of KSA and Other GCC Countries

The final theme of the present study is the female representation among the leadership in the government sector of KSA and other GCC countries. Sinha (2020) conducted a study to evaluate the impact of the institutional, cultural, social, and economic factors on women's workplace participation in Bahrain. Results of the study showed that many women in Bahrain are working in the financial sector, and

consequently, universities also focus more on financial education. However, women's career progression to become leaders in Bahrain is slower than men's due to different factors, such as perception bias, socio-cultural constraints, policy choices, and job requirements. Al-Barghouth & Rifa (2017) conducted a study on Bahrain women leaders to evaluate the reasons and factors behind their success, motivation, and beliefs towards leadership. Notably, the participants stated that the difficulties and struggles related to gender discrimination, culture, and social status, led them to emerge as strong leaders.

In contrast to Bahrain, a study in another GCC country – Kuwait – reported that women leaders in the Kuwaiti public sector and their leadership styles are highly recognized (Alzougool, AlMansour & AlAjmi, 2021). These studies indicate that the policies and perceptions related to women leadership in Bahrain need to be changed at the earliest. A comprehensive study by Kemp, Madsen & Davis (2015) compared the Arab Gulf states regarding women leaders in different positions. In this study, a quantitative gender analysis of 2805 publicly and private listed companies in KSA, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE was done. By evaluating the position of women in these organizations, it is identified that there is less participation of women in business leadership. The main issue highlighted is the cultural perceptions towards the participation of women in the growth of the economy.

Bahry & Marr (2005) conducted a study to evaluate the role of the Qatari women as leaders. Results revealed that in the last 20 years, several positive changes emerged in their culture. On the other hand, it is also identified that there are defined borders in Qatar that women cannot cross as per their tradition and culture. This study implies that social reform is progressing in Qatar even though at a slow pace. The major drawback of this study is that it dates back 2005. On the other hand, there are not many peer-reviewed studies available in Qatar context.

Through a comparative study, Hamdan et al. (2021) evaluated the female participation in the boards of 125 public industrial firms in the GCC countries. Notably, the company-specific and corporate governance variables could predict the participation of females as the board members. Furthermore, a female directors' selection is positively related to the board's independence and institutional ownership. However, it is related negatively to the leverage and size of the firm.

5. Discussion

The implications of the recent changes in women's empowerment policies and factors associated with it can be broadly classified into theoretical and practical variables, which are discussed below.

5.1. Theoretical Contributions

After evaluating several studies on women empowerment and leadership opportunities in Saudi Arabia and GCC countries, it is identified that women are facing several issues related to living independently; main reason for this is the cultural practices, perceptions, and beliefs of the people (Al-Qahtani et al., 2021). They face issues at the workplace and in traveling independently in these regions. However, some effective implementations have been done with time, such as Saudi Vision 2030 (Varshney,

2019). Effective planning and implementation of policies have been done, which is evident from the change in the perceptions of males and family members in the GCC region, towards women's empowerment. However, there is a need for considerable improvement so that women in the GCC countries can have opportunities to improve their skillsets and demonstrate their leadership skills in every sector (Topal, 2019).

5.2. Practical Implications

Government's support, social media, and raised voices of women are instrumental for the effective implementation and in negotiating contemporary problems in women empowerment and leadership (Eum, 2019). It has been evaluated that KSA has been involved in different international activities and societies, which are at work to improve education and health (Saleh & Malibari, 2021). These initiatives may help the women of KSA to overcome the challenges by using these opportunities to present their leadership skills. Moreover, the KSA government has also initiated programs to enhance skills and training. Women involved in such programs will get a chance to enhance their skills and work in the organizations as effective leaders (Abalkhail, 2019). The recent research indicates that though there is a slow progress in the GCC countries with regards to women in leadership, the scenario needs to improve considerably through proper implementation of policies.

6. Limitations

Firstly, only 18 research publications could be obtained after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This indicates the possibility of a too stringent inclusion/exclusion criteria. On the other hand, this may also be due to a lack of adequate number of studies in the region on this subject. Therefore, the researchers involved in this study concluded that further research is required substantiate the themes evolved through this systematic review. Secondly, this study is based on systematic literature review and hence we cannot exclude a chance for personal bias. So, a longitudinal study should be launched to check the possible variations in the women empowerment policies and leadership. Lastly, this study is primarily qualitative in nature – which means the results may be evaluated quantitatively to substantiate them.

7. Conclusion

All over the world, women participate in every sector and even work in leading positions. In countries like KSA and other GCC countries, women are experiencing challenges in working as entrepreneurs and leading positions in different sectors. However, these countries are gradually changing their perceptions towards women's empowerment and offers women with more opportunities to live and earn independently. Moreover, KSA is more concerned about increasing its investment and expanding its economy without relying only on the earnings from oil trading. This plan has lead to training and development, which can make females strong and skilled to work effectively in different industries. Though the perception of people living in the GCC countries is changing, proper planning and strategic implementation are needed to change the culture and to boost women's empowerment and leadership.

8. Future Directions

The present study can play a significant role in strengthening the literature on the women's empowerment in the GCC countries. We suggest gender-specific training programs to improve the perception of the society and to implement affirmation in recruitment for the female leaders. Added, providing professional training programs to the women can play an essential role in polishing the professional capabilities and can boost the value of females in the labor market. It is required to conduct further research works in this arena, which may present more effective solutions for these issues. Since the present systematic review is qualitative in nature, further primary research works/surveys/quantitative studies are required to amass a deeper understanding regarding the issue.

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Appendix - Summary of Systematic Literature Review**Appendix 1. A summary of the articles selected for the systematic literature review**

S. NO	Author	Journal name	Aim of the study	Research design	Type of data	Type of data analysis	Research Approach
1	Alotaibi (2020)	Open Journal of Leadership	To evaluate the factors that may act as hurdles for the women to attain the leadership position in higher education in the Saudi Arabi	Qualitative	Primary (semi-structured interview)	Thematic Analysis	Interpretivism approach
2	Alasgah & Alshamari (2021)	SYLWAN	To evaluate the significance of training in empowering women leaders and the influence of economic empowerment of the females (as a result of Saudi Vision 2030) on the growth procedures of the KSA	Quantitative	Primary (Questionnaire)	Statistical Analysis	Descriptive approach
3	Yusuf & Abdulmohsen (2021)	Review of International Geographical Education Online	to evaluate the influence of women empowerment and the online education system in KSA.	Qualitative	Secondary	Content Analysis (systematic literature review)	Descriptive approach
4	Alkhaleel & Berglund (2018)	Entrepreneurship & Regional Development	approach to investigate the life stories of the women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia and Sweden	Qualitative	Primary (face to face interview)	Thematic analysis	Narrative approach
5	Sabir & Zenaidi (2019)	American Journal of Management	To explore the need for change in the practices of commercial centres and	Quantitative	Primary (survey)	Statistical analysis	Inductive approach

		Science and Engineering	perception and practices related to the involvement of females in the labour force in KSA.				
6	Saleh & Malibari (2021)	Behavioral Sciences	to evaluate the factors that impact the travel decisions after and before allowing the females to drive in KSA. In this study	qualitative	Primary (semi-structured interview)	Thematic analysis	Inductive approach
7	Allison (2021)	The Leadership of Women in the Saudi Higher Education System	to evaluate the ways through which Saudi females can attain leadership positions in the higher education institutions in KSA	Mixed	Primary (interview) and secondary (literature review)	Thematic analysis	Inductive approach
8	Abalkhail, (2019)	Human Resource Development International	to evaluate the perspective of women related to the necessity of gaining the position of a senior leader in the Arab Middle East	Qualitative	Primary (in-depth, semi-structured interviews)	Thematic analysis	Inductive approach
9	Afzal & Omar (2021)	Register Journal	to explore the ideological construction and news representation related to the reforms presented in Saudi Vision 2020	Qualitative	Secondary	corpus-based critical discourse analysis (CDA)	Descriptive approach
110	Elsayed & Elmulth	International Journal of	analyse the potential of meeting the Saudi vision	Qualitative and quantitative	Mixed	Descriptive and quantitative	Mixed

	um (2017)	Current Research	2030 goals for empowering the women of Saudi Arabia.			ve analysis	
111	Alsufyan et al. (2020)	International Journal of Africa Nursing Sciences	to present a plan for making effective regulations and policies to overcome the issues in reaching “The Gold Standard” in nursing practices in KSA	Qualitative	Secondary	Content analysis	Descriptive approach
112	Sinha (2020)	Social Change	to evaluate the impact of the institutional, cultural, social and economic factors on the workplace participation of women in Bahrain.	Qualitative	Secondary	Content analysis	Descriptive approach
113	Al-Bargho uth & Rifa (2017)	Case Studies in Business and Management	to evaluate the reasons and factors behind the successful leadership of Bahrain women, their motivation and beliefs towards leadership	in-depth qualitative open-ended interview	Primary	Thematic analysis	Inductive
114	Kemp, Madsen & Davis (2015)	International Journal of Cross- Cultural Management	to compare the Arab Gulf states about the existence of women leaders in different positions	quantitative gender analysis	Primary	Statistical analysis	Descriptive approach
115	Hamdan et al. (2021)	International Journal of Management Science and Engineering	to evaluate the phenomenon of female participation in the boards of industrial public firms in the GCC countries	Quantitative	Primary	Statistical analysis	deductive approach

		ing Manage ment					
116	Kattan et al., (2016)	Asian Social Science	to highlight the factors that promote success generally in the foremost companies and particularly the success of the females with the prominence of the status of Saudi women in the selected factors	Qualitati ve	Secondary	Thematic analysis and use of model	Inductive
117	Bahry & Marr (2005),	Middle East Policy	to evaluate the role of the Qatari women as leaders	Qualitati ve	Secondary	Content analysis	Inductive
118	Alsubai e & Jones (2017)	Adminis trative Sciences	to evaluate the present state of women leaders in higher education in KSA	Qualitati ve	Secondary	Content analysis	Inductive

Appendix 2. Summary of Systematic Literature Review

S. NO	Author	Findings	Limitations	Contribution
1	Alotaibi (2020)	It indicates that the main challenges are organisational barriers, cultural barriers and personal barriers.	The limitation of the study is it is based on a qualitative research design and has a small sample size	This study helps to provide evidence related to the experience of Saudi women in the education sector and the challenges they face to get their desired and deserving posts.
2	Alasgah & Alshammari (2021)	A strong correlation is found between the challenges faced by women and trends towards economic empowerment and training.	Specific details related to their experiences cannot be identified	Highlighted the importance of women's economic empowerment
3	Yusuf & Abdulmohsen (2021)	KSA government has adopted a technology-driven approach to provide quality education and encouraged women to work as leaders in the education system to fight the challenges of gender discrimination	An element of bias is present due to the qualitative nature of the study	Effective strategies are highlighted to strengthen the education system and to support women in laying their role in achieving this goal
4	Alkhaled & Berglund (2018)	Entrepreneur women faced several hurdles such as criticism however, they remain firm and many organisations and their governments even supported them leading them to success	Lack of statistical presentation	The stories of these leaders may inspire and motivate other women to follow the same path
5	Sabir & Zenaidi (2019)	Perceptions towards the working of women in the commercial markers are becoming positive	Limited research is available related to the challenges faced by females starting their careers as entrepreneurs	This study will help to promote the working of women in KSA
6	Saleh & Malibari (2021)	The main travelling options of the high-class women are private driving 'before' and 'after' they prefer to drive their own car	The limitation of the study is it has included limited factors to evaluate the impact of the Saudi Vision	These results are helpful for the decision-makers to make significant implications
7	Allison (2021)	Saudi women experience insubordination, disrespect and working issues in this sector and proper support is not provided by the management.	The limitation of the study is the results may not be validated due to the small sample size	Concerns are raised related to gender discrimination in the higher education institutes in Saudi Arabia.
8	Abalkhail, (2019)	Results of the study showed that human resource practitioners	The limitation of the study is an element of bias is present due to	This study helps to provide guidance related to the implementation of

		must implement policies related to gender equality at the workplace so that the challenges faced by working women can be overcome.	the qualitative nature of the study.	effective policies to protect the rights of women.
9	Afzal & Omar (2021)	Under the logical orientation, the KSA press has developed the Saudi Vision 2030 as a matter of public interest. It was highlighted that women empowerment towards inclination under this vision.	The limitation of the study is it has included and evaluated only the content present in the newspapers.	This research has shown that women empowerment programs in KSA will be practically implemented and every woman will get a chance to be treated equally and will have equal opportunities as males within the business sector.
110	Elsayed & Elmulthum (2017)	e population of men and women is almost the same in KSA as per the census of 2015	it is limited to the data of 2015 and 2016.	Presented the need for effective strategies to meet the goals of the 2030 Saudi Vision
111	Alsufyan et al. (2020)	effective efforts are required to enhance the nursing practices by altering the present policies and standards in KSA	it has highlighted the issues of nursing practices to be considered in the Saudi Vision 2030	it is in the initial approach hence, the need for improvement is required
112	Sinha (2020)	career progression of women in Bahrain is slower than men due to different factors in the financial sector	It is based on only qualitative analysis hence; quantitative analysis is also required to present statistical evidence of these results	to highlight the challenges and opportunities of women in the financial sector of Bahrain related to career growth and development
113	Al-Barghout & Rifa (2017)	that the factors including the difficulties and struggles related to gender discrimination, culture and social status led the women in Bahrain to emerge as strong leaders	it is limited to Bahrain only.	it has provided a strong base to conduct quantitative research in future considering all the GCC countries
114	Kemp, Madsen & Davis (2015)	There is less participation of the women in business leadership	many companies did not provide complete details of their company	it has highlighted the factors the government should consider to strengthen women as leaders in these regions
115	Hamdan et al. (2021)	the selection of female directors is related positively to the board's independence and institutional ownership. However, is related negatively to the leverage and size of the firm. The limitation of the study is not every company provided complete data	not every company provided their complete data	it has highlighted the enhanced governance variables that can help to build positive support for women empowerment in GCC countries.

116	Kattan et al., (2016)	Results show that society and society may act as a hurdle in the path of the success of the Saudi women leaders. Also, it is found that Knowledge has a negative impact on Saudi culture	The limitation of the study is there is limited literature available in relation to the aim of the study	The contribution of the study is it has highlighted that with the support of King Abdullah, women can demonstrate leadership success
117	Bahry & Marr (2005)	Results revealed that in the last 20 years, there are several positive changes emerged in their culture. Women have open doors to get an education and choose the profession of their choice	The limitation of the study is there are limited studies available on evaluating the experiences of the Qatar ladies to understand the challenges they face and the opportunities they have in Qatar to become successful leaders.	The contribution of the study is it has identified that social reform is progressing in Qatar but at a slow pace
118	Alsubaie and Jones (2017)	Results obtained after a secondary literature review showed that effective policies are required to be implicated in KSA to support women to gain success and work in a higher-positions in the education sector.	The limitation of the study is an element of bias is present as a result of conducting a secondary literature review.	The contribution of the study is it has provided future direction to explore the rural, urban and traditional areas to gain strong evidence to conduct the empirical study