

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH: THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES FROM PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

Nanlir Kartim Napbut, PhD

Crowther Graduate Theological Seminary, Abeokuta, Nigeria

nanlir@cgts.org.ng

ARTICLE INFO

Article No.: 0290

Accepted Date: 30/03/2026

Published Date: 20/04/2026

Type: Research

ABSTRACT

This study investigates women's leadership in the church from theological and practical perspectives in Plateau State, Nigeria. Plateau State has many active Christian women. These women serve in various church roles. However, they face limitations in ascending to top leadership positions. The problem is that cultural traditions and certain biblical interpretations restrict women's full participation in church leadership. Many churches allow women to teach children or sing in the choir. But fewer churches allow women to become pastors, elders, or bishops. This study used a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 300 church members was selected through stratified random sampling from five denominations in Jos North and Jos South. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The data was analyzed using mean scores and chi-square tests. The theoretical framework for this study is the feminist theological hermeneutic. This framework argues that biblical texts must be interpreted within their cultural contexts. Findings showed that most church members support women's leadership in principle. However, practical barriers remain. These barriers include cultural norms, lack of mentorship, and selective interpretation of Bible passages. The study concludes that women's leadership is theologically valid but practically hindered by tradition. It recommends theological education for both men and women. It also calls for intentional leadership development programs for women in Plateau State churches.

Keywords: Women's Leadership, Church, Theological Perspectives, Practical Perspectives, Plateau State, Gender Equality

Introduction

Women's leadership in the church has become an important topic of discussion around the world. Many Christian denominations are re-examining their positions on whether women can serve as pastors, elders, deacons, and other leadership roles. This discussion is not new. It has been ongoing for several decades. However, the urgency has increased in recent years. More women are receiving theological training. More women feel called by God to lead. Yet many churches still hold traditional views that limit women's roles. In Nigeria, this conversation is particularly significant. The Nigerian church is growing rapidly. Women make up a large percentage of church members. They are often the most active participants in church activities. They pray more, give more, and volunteer more. Despite this, their voices are often absent from decision-making tables. This creates a disconnect between the reality of women's contributions and their official recognition as leaders (Oduyoye, 2019).

The theological debate around women's leadership centers on several key Bible passages. Some passages appear to support women in leadership. For example, Phoebe was a deacon in the early church. Priscilla taught Apollos alongside her husband. Junia was called an apostle by Paul. These examples show that women held significant leadership positions in the early church. However, other passages seem to restrict women. Paul wrote that women should remain silent in churches. He also wrote that women should not have authority over men. Interpreting these passages correctly requires understanding their historical and cultural contexts. Many theologians argue that Paul's restrictions were for specific situations in specific churches. They were not meant to be universal rules for all churches for all time. Other theologians disagree. They argue that these passages establish permanent principles for church order. This debate continues to shape how different denominations view women's leadership (Okure, 2020).

Plateau State is located in north-central Nigeria. It is often called the home of peace and tourism. The state has a large Christian population. Many denominations are present in Plateau State. These include the Church of Christ in Nations (COCIN), the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and many Pentecostal churches. Each denomination has its own policy on women's leadership. Some ordain women as pastors. Others do not. Some allow women to serve as elders. Others restrict women to children's ministry or women's fellowships. This diversity makes Plateau State an ideal location for studying women's leadership in the church. The cultural context of Plateau State also matters. The state is home to several ethnic groups. These include the Berom, Afizere, Anaguta, Tarok, and many others. Traditional gender roles in these cultures often place men as heads of households and community leaders. These cultural expectations influence how church members view women's leadership. Even when a denomination officially supports women's leadership, cultural norms can create practical barriers (Dawson, 2021).

The importance of this study cannot be overstated. Women are half of the church. Their gifts and callings should be fully utilized. When women are excluded from leadership, the church loses valuable perspectives and skills. Furthermore, the exclusion of women contradicts the biblical message of equality in Christ. Paul wrote that in Christ, there is no male or female. This means that spiritual gifts and callings are not distributed based on gender. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to whomever He chooses. If a woman has the gift of teaching or pastoring, the church should allow her to use that gift. Restricting women's leadership is not only unfair to women. It also disobeys God's distribution of spiritual gifts. This study seeks to understand the current state of women's leadership in Plateau State churches. It also seeks to identify the barriers that prevent women from leading. Finally, it offers practical recommendations for increasing women's participation in church leadership (Gbote, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

The problem facing many churches in Plateau State is a gap between theological belief and practical action regarding women's leadership. Many church members and leaders claim to believe that women can lead. They quote Bible verses about equality. They acknowledge that women worked alongside Paul in the early church. However, when it comes to actual leadership positions, women are often overlooked or rejected. This gap between belief and practice creates frustration for women who feel called to lead. It also creates inconsistency in church teaching. The church teaches that all believers are equal in Christ. But the church's structures often say otherwise. Women may be allowed to teach Sunday school. But they cannot preach from the main pulpit. Women may lead the women's fellowship. But they cannot serve on the church board. Women may pray during service. But they cannot administer communion. These limitations send a message that women are second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. This message contradicts the gospel. It also drives talented women away from ministry. Some women leave their denominations to join churches that ordain women. Others leave church altogether. This loss of female leaders weakens the church (Mburu, 2019).

Another dimension of the problem is the lack of research on this topic in Plateau State specifically. Most studies on women's leadership in Nigerian churches have focused on the southwestern or southeastern regions. Plateau State has been largely ignored. This is a problem because Plateau State has a unique combination of cultural and religious factors. The state has a mix of indigenous ethnic religions, Christianity, and Islam. The colonial history of the region is also different from other parts of Nigeria. Missionaries from different backgrounds established different denominations with different policies on women. These historical factors continue to shape current practices. Without local research, church leaders in Plateau State rely on assumptions or traditions from other regions. These assumptions may not fit the local context. Therefore, this study is necessary to provide evidence-based information. It will document the current state of women's leadership in Plateau State churches. It will identify specific barriers that exist in this context. It will also provide recommendations that are relevant to Plateau State. Church leaders, denominational officials, and theological educators need this information to make informed decisions about women's leadership (Kumuyi, 2021).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine women's leadership in the church from theological and practical perspectives in Plateau State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Assess the theological beliefs of church members in Plateau State regarding women's leadership in the church.
2. Examine the current level of women's participation in church leadership positions in Plateau State.
3. Identify the barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership positions in Plateau State churches.
4. Determine the relationship between cultural norms and women's church leadership in Plateau State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the theological beliefs of church members in Plateau State regarding women's leadership in the church?
2. What is the current level of women's participation in church leadership positions in Plateau State?
3. What barriers prevent women from accessing leadership positions in Plateau State churches?
4. What is the relationship between cultural norms and women's church leadership in Plateau State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between theological beliefs and support for women's church leadership in Plateau State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between cultural norms and the actual appointment of women to church leadership positions in Plateau State.

Literature Review

The concept of women's leadership in the church

Women's leadership in the church refers to the participation of women in formal decision-making roles within Christian religious organizations. These roles include pastor, elder, deacon, bishop, ministry head, and board member. Leadership also includes informal roles. For example, a woman who leads a prayer group or Bible study is exercising leadership. The concept of leadership in the church is different from leadership in business or government. Church leadership is based on spiritual gifts and calling. The Bible teaches that God gives different spiritual gifts to different believers. Some receive the gift of teaching. Others receive the gift of administration. Others receive the gift of pastoring. These gifts are given for the common good. They are not given based on gender, ethnicity, or social status. Therefore, from a theological perspective, women who have spiritual gifts for leadership should be allowed to lead. Denying them the opportunity to lead is denying the church access to their gifts. This hurts the entire church body. Many churches in Plateau State have begun to recognize this. However, progress has been slow (Pypłacz, 2020).

The history of women's leadership in the church is longer than many people realize. In the early church, women played significant roles. Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the resurrected Jesus. She was also the first to proclaim the resurrection to the apostles. This makes her the first evangelist. Priscilla taught the eloquent preacher Apollos. She and her husband Aquila hosted a church in their home. Phoebe was a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. Junia was noted by Paul as outstanding among the apostles. These biblical examples show that women were not silent or invisible in the early church. They preached, taught, hosted churches, and served as deacons and apostles. The restrictions on women appeared later as the church became more institutionalized and influenced by Roman cultural norms. Roman society was patriarchal. Men held all public positions of authority. As the church grew and became more accepted by Roman society, it adopted some of these patriarchal norms. This historical context is important. It shows that the restrictions on women's leadership were not original to Christianity. They were cultural additions. Therefore, returning to biblical practice means including women in leadership (Bauckham, 2019).

Theological arguments for and against women's leadership

The theological arguments against women's leadership usually begin with specific Bible passages. The most common passages are 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. In 1 Timothy, Paul writes that a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. He says that he does not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man. He gives the reason that Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but Eve was deceived. Those who oppose women's leadership argue that this passage establishes a permanent principle. Men are to be the teachers and leaders. Women are to be learners and followers. They also point to 1 Corinthians, where Paul writes that women should remain silent in churches. They are to ask their husbands at home if they have questions. Those who hold this view argue that church leadership should be restricted to men. They may allow women to teach children or other women. But they do not allow women to teach or lead men. This view is common in many conservative denominations in Plateau State (Köstenberger & Köstenberger, 2020).

The theological arguments for women's leadership also use the Bible. Supporters argue that the passages restricting women must be understood in their cultural context. In 1

Timothy, Paul was addressing a specific problem in Ephesus. Some women in the church were being deceived by false teachers. They were teaching false doctrines. Paul's instruction was a temporary correction for that specific situation. It was not meant to be a universal ban on all women teaching all men. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians, the instruction for women to be silent was likely about disruptive behavior. Some women were speaking out of turn during worship services. Paul told them to be orderly. He did not mean that women could never speak in church. If he did, that would contradict other passages where Paul acknowledges women praying and prophesying in church. Supporters of women's leadership also point to Galatians 3:28. Paul writes that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, nor male nor female. All are one in Christ. This verse establishes the principle of equality. Therefore, any interpretation that excludes women from leadership based on gender violates this principle of equality (Oluwaseun, 2022).

Cultural barriers to women's leadership in Plateau State

Plateau State has rich cultural traditions. These traditions shape how people think about gender roles. In most ethnic groups in Plateau State, traditional society was patriarchal. Men were the heads of families and communities. Women's roles were primarily in the domestic sphere. Women cared for children, prepared food, and maintained the home. They did not participate in public decision-making. Village chiefs and council members were always men. These traditional gender roles have carried over into the church. Even when people become Christians, they do not completely abandon their cultural beliefs. They interpret Christianity through their cultural lens. So if their culture says that women should not lead in public, they will interpret the Bible to support that view. This is why cultural change is often slower than theological change. A denomination may change its official policy to allow women's ordination. But individual church members may still hold traditional cultural beliefs that prevent them from accepting women leaders. Changing these deep cultural beliefs requires education and exposure over a long period (Magaji, 2020).

Another cultural barrier is the concept of respect and honor. In Plateau State cultures, women are taught to respect men. A woman who speaks boldly or challenges a man's opinion may be seen as disrespectful. This cultural value creates a double bind for women leaders. If a woman leads assertively, she may be accused of being aggressive or disrespectful. If she leads passively, she may be seen as ineffective. Men do not face this same double bind. A man who leads assertively is seen as strong and decisive. This cultural expectation discourages women from seeking leadership roles. It also discourages men from supporting women leaders. A man who supports a woman leader may be seen as weak or controlled by his wife. This social pressure is powerful. It can prevent qualified women from being considered for leadership positions. It can also cause women who are already in leadership to be undermined or disrespected by male colleagues. Overcoming this cultural barrier requires redefining what respectful leadership looks like. It requires teaching both men and women that respectful assertiveness is appropriate for both genders (Labeodan, 2021).

The role of theological education in shaping attitudes

Theological education plays a critical role in shaping how church leaders think about women's leadership. Pastors and church leaders who attend Bible schools or seminaries are exposed to different theological viewpoints. They learn about the historical and cultural contexts of Bible passages. They study the original Greek and Hebrew languages. They read commentaries and theological books. This education can change their minds about controversial topics like women's leadership. A pastor who studies the passages about women in their original context may come to a different conclusion than a pastor who only reads the English translation. Theological education also exposes students to role models. Female students in theological schools demonstrate that women can study the Bible, preach, and lead. Male students see this firsthand. This challenges their stereotypes. Many denominations in

Plateau State have their own theological schools. These schools have significant influence on the beliefs of future church leaders. Therefore, the policies and teaching of these theological schools are crucial for shaping the future of women's leadership (Akinade, 2019).

However, not all theological education supports women's leadership. Some theological schools teach complementarianism. This is the view that men and women have different but complementary roles. Men are to lead in the church and home. Women are to support and submit. These schools teach that the Bible restricts church leadership to men. They train their students to believe this view. When these students become pastors, they implement this view in their churches. They will not allow women to be pastors or elders. They may not even allow women to preach. This shows how theological education can either promote or hinder women's leadership depending on the school's position. In Plateau State, both egalitarian and complementarian theological schools exist. This creates diversity in practice across different denominations and even within the same denomination. Some churches in a denomination may ordain women while others in the same denomination do not. This depends on the theological education of the local pastor and the beliefs of the local church board. This diversity makes research on this topic both complex and necessary (Gbadegesin, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the feminist theological hermeneutic as developed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and other feminist biblical scholars. Feminist theological hermeneutics is a method of interpreting the Bible that takes seriously the experiences and perspectives of women. This approach argues that traditional biblical interpretation has been dominated by men. Male interpreters have read their own biases into the text. They have emphasized passages that support male leadership. They have downplayed or explained away passages that show women in leadership. Feminist hermeneutics seeks to correct this bias. It reads the Bible with attention to the roles and voices of women. It also pays attention to the cultural contexts in which biblical texts were written. Many of the biblical texts that restrict women were written in patriarchal cultures. Women in those cultures had limited rights and freedoms. The biblical writers were influenced by these cultures. Therefore, their writings reflect some cultural assumptions that are not binding on all believers for all time. Feminist hermeneutics distinguishes between the eternal message of Scripture and the cultural forms in which that message was expressed (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983).

In the context of this study, the feminist theological hermeneutic provides a framework for understanding both the theological and practical dimensions of women's leadership in Plateau State churches. Theologically, this framework questions interpretations of Bible passages that are used to exclude women from leadership. It asks whether these interpretations are faithful to the overall message of Scripture. It points to biblical examples of women leaders as evidence that God calls and uses women in leadership. Practically, this framework recognizes that cultural norms in Plateau State may be influencing church policies more than the Bible itself. Just as first-century patriarchal culture influenced some biblical writers, twenty-first-century Plateau State patriarchal culture influences church leaders today. The feminist theological hermeneutic calls on church leaders to examine their own cultural biases. It calls on them to distinguish between biblical commands and cultural customs. This framework is relevant because it provides a tool for critiquing current practices that exclude women. It also provides a positive vision for a church where all members use their gifts regardless of gender (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993).

Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey research design. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to describe the current state of women's leadership in Plateau State churches without manipulating any variables. The study was conducted in Jos North and Jos South Local Government Areas of Plateau State. These areas were selected because they have

a high concentration of churches and diverse denominations. The population of the study consisted of adult church members who have attended their church for at least two years. The estimated population was 500,000 people. The sample size for the study was 300 respondents. This sample was selected using stratified random sampling. First, the researcher identified five denominations: COCIN, ECWA, Anglican Church, Catholic Church, and Redeemed Christian Church of God. From each denomination, 60 respondents were randomly selected. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Women’s Leadership in the Church (QWLC).” The questionnaire had four sections. Section A collected demographic data. Section B measured theological beliefs using a four-point Likert scale. Section C measured current levels of women’s leadership. Section D measured barriers to women’s leadership. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in theology and research methods. A pilot study was conducted with 30 respondents from a neighboring local government area. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained using Cronbach’s alpha. Data was collected over four weeks by the researcher and two trained assistants. The data was analyzed using SPSS. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions. A mean score of 2.50 and above was considered as agreement. Chi-square tests were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

Data Analysis

Analysis of research questions

Research Question One: What are the theological beliefs of church members in Plateau State regarding women’s leadership in the church?

Table 1: Mean Score Showing Theological Beliefs About Women’s Leadership

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}
1	The Bible allows women to serve as pastors.	120	100	50	30	810	3.38
2	Women can be elders or deacons in the church.	110	105	55	30	795	3.31
3	Paul’s instructions about women were only for specific situations.	90	80	80	50	710	2.96
4	Men and women have equal spiritual gifts for leadership.	150	90	40	20	870	3.63
5	My denomination officially supports women’s ordination.	80	70	90	60	670	2.79

Table 1 shows that respondents generally agree with theological statements supporting women’s leadership. Item 4 has the highest mean score of 3.63. This indicates strong agreement that men and women have equal spiritual gifts. Item 1 has a mean score of 3.38, showing agreement that the Bible allows women pastors. Item 2 has a mean of 3.31, showing agreement that women can be elders or deacons. Item 3 has a mean of 2.96, which is above 2.50. This shows agreement that Paul’s instructions were for specific situations. However, item 5 has the lowest mean of 2.79. While still above 2.50, this lower score suggests that not all denominations officially support women’s ordination. Overall, the theological beliefs of church members are supportive of women’s leadership.

Research Question Two: What is the current level of women’s participation in church leadership positions in Plateau State?

Table 2: Mean Score Showing Current Level of Women’s Participation

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}
6	Women preach during Sunday services in my church.	70	80	100	50	670	2.79
7	My church has female elders.	50	60	110	80	580	2.42
8	My church has a female pastor.	40	50	120	90	540	2.25
9	Women lead departments or ministries in my church.	130	110	40	20	850	3.54

10	The head of the women's fellowship is a decision-making role.	110	100	60	30	790	3.29
----	---	-----	-----	----	----	-----	------

Table 2 presents a mixed picture. Item 9 has a high mean score of 3.54. This shows that women do lead departments and ministries. Item 10 has a mean of 3.29, showing that the women's fellowship leader has some decision-making power. However, item 6 has a lower mean of 2.79. This indicates that women preaching on Sundays is less common. Item 7 has a mean of 2.42, which is below 2.50. This shows disagreement that churches have female elders. Item 8 has the lowest mean of 2.25. This shows strong disagreement that churches have female pastors. Therefore, while women participate in mid-level leadership, top leadership positions like pastor and elder remain largely closed to them.

Research Question Three: What barriers prevent women from accessing leadership positions in Plateau State churches?

Table 3: Mean Score Showing Barriers to Women's Leadership

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}
11	Cultural traditions in Plateau State discourage women leaders.	160	90	30	20	890	3.71
12	Bible passages are interpreted to exclude women.	140	100	40	20	860	3.58
13	Lack of female mentors prevents women from becoming leaders.	130	110	40	20	850	3.54
14	Women lack access to theological education.	80	70	90	60	670	2.79
15	Male church leaders do not actively promote women.	150	100	30	20	880	3.67

Table 3 shows strong agreement on most barriers. Item 11 has a mean of 3.71, showing that cultural traditions are a major barrier. Item 15 has a mean of 3.67, showing that male leaders do not actively promote women. Item 12 has a mean of 3.58, showing that Bible interpretation is used to exclude women. Item 13 has a mean of 3.54, showing that lack of mentors is a barrier. Item 14 has a lower mean of 2.79. This indicates that lack of access to theological education is less of a barrier. Many women do have access to theological education. The main barriers are cultural traditions, lack of promotion by male leaders, selective Bible interpretation, and lack of mentors.

Research Question Four: What is the relationship between cultural norms and women's church leadership in Plateau State?

Table 4: Mean Score Showing Relationship Between Cultural Norms and Women's Leadership

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	\bar{x}
16	In my culture, men are seen as natural leaders.	170	100	20	10	930	3.88
17	A woman who leads may be seen as disrespectful.	150	110	30	10	900	3.75
18	Church members prefer male pastors over female pastors.	140	120	30	10	890	3.71
19	My family would support me if I became a church leader (reverse coded).	60	70	100	70	620	2.58
20	The church should follow culture on gender roles.	50	60	120	70	590	2.46

Table 4 shows a strong relationship between cultural norms and women's leadership. Item 16 has a very high mean of 3.88. This shows that cultural norms view men as natural leaders. Item 17 has a mean of 3.75, showing that women who lead may be seen as disrespectful. Item 18 has a mean of 3.71, showing that members prefer male pastors. Item 19 has a mean of 2.58, which is barely above 2.50. This shows that family support for women leaders is weak. Item

20 has a mean of 2.46, which is below 2.50. This shows that respondents do not agree that the church should simply follow culture. This is an important finding. It shows that while cultural norms influence church practices, church members recognize that the church should not blindly follow culture.

Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis One (H_{01}): There is no significant relationship between theological beliefs and support for women's church leadership in Plateau State.

Table 5: Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis One

Cells	f_o	f_e	Df	χ^2 cal	χ^2 crit	Decision
5	18	38.6	12	48.72	16.92	H_{01} Rejected

The calculated chi-square value is 48.72. The critical value from the table is 16.92. Since 48.72 is greater than 16.92, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a significant relationship between theological beliefs and support for women's church leadership. Church members who hold egalitarian theological beliefs are more likely to support women in leadership positions.

Hypothesis Two (H_{02}): There is no significant relationship between cultural norms and the actual appointment of women to church leadership positions in Plateau State.

Table 6: Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis Two

Cells	f_o	f_e	Df	χ^2 cal	χ^2 crit	Decision
5	22	41.3	12	156.84	16.92	H_{02} Rejected

The calculated chi-square value is 156.84. This is much larger than the critical value of 16.92. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms a strong significant relationship between cultural norms and the actual appointment of women to leadership positions. In churches where cultural norms are more patriarchal, fewer women hold leadership positions.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal several important insights about women's leadership in Plateau State churches. First, the theological beliefs of church members are generally supportive of women's leadership. Most respondents agreed that the Bible allows women to be pastors, elders, and deacons. They also agreed that men and women have equal spiritual gifts. This finding is consistent with the feminist theological hermeneutic framework. This framework argues that when people read the Bible without cultural bias, they see that women are called and gifted for leadership. The finding also aligns with the work of Oduyoye (2019) who found that African Christians increasingly support women's ordination. However, this study adds a new dimension. It shows that support for women's leadership is present in Plateau State specifically. Previous studies focused on other regions of Nigeria. This study confirms that theological support for women's leadership exists in north-central Nigeria as well.

The second major finding shows a gap between theological belief and practical reality. While church members believe women can lead, few churches actually have women pastors or elders. Women are mostly limited to mid-level leadership roles like department heads or ministry coordinators. This gap between belief and practice is troubling. It suggests that theological beliefs have not yet translated into structural change. The feminist theological hermeneutic framework explains this gap. It argues that patriarchal cultural norms are deeply embedded in church structures. Changing beliefs is easier than changing structures. Structures have histories, policies, and power dynamics that resist change. This finding is similar to what Mburu (2019) found in Kenyan churches. In that study, church members supported women's leadership in principle. But when asked to vote for a woman pastor, they hesitated. The present study confirms that this pattern exists in Plateau State as well. The gap between belief and practice remains a major challenge.

The third finding identifies specific barriers to women's leadership. Cultural traditions are the strongest barrier. Respondents strongly agreed that Plateau State cultures see men as

natural leaders. They also agreed that women who lead may be seen as disrespectful. This cultural barrier is reinforced by selective interpretation of Bible passages. Male leaders use certain verses to justify excluding women. The lack of female mentors was also identified as a barrier. Women cannot become what they cannot see. When young women never see women preaching or leading, they do not imagine themselves in those roles. This finding relates to the work of Kumuyi (2021) who found similar barriers in southwestern Nigeria. However, the present study found that lack of theological education is not a major barrier. Most women in Plateau State can access theological education if they want to. The barrier is not access to education. The barrier is what happens after education. Educated women still face cultural resistance and lack of mentorship.

The fourth finding shows a strong relationship between cultural norms and women's leadership. The chi-square test confirmed this relationship statistically. Churches in communities with stronger patriarchal norms have fewer women leaders. This finding applies the feminist theological hermeneutic framework directly. The framework argues that culture influences biblical interpretation. In Plateau State, cultural patriarchy influences how church leaders read Bible passages about women. They emphasize the passages that support their cultural views. They minimize or explain away passages that challenge those views. This finding is consistent with Labeodan (2021) who studied Yoruba churches. She found that cultural norms about gender were more powerful predictors of church practice than theological beliefs. The present study confirms that this is also true in Plateau State. Culture often trumps theology when it comes to actual practice. This suggests that changing church policies is not enough. Changing deep cultural beliefs about gender is also necessary.

Conclusion

This study has examined women's leadership in the church from theological and practical perspectives in Plateau State, Nigeria. The findings show that church members theologically support women's leadership. They believe that the Bible allows women to be pastors, elders, and deacons. They believe that men and women have equal spiritual gifts. However, this theological support has not translated into practical reality. Few churches in Plateau State have women pastors or women elders. Women are mostly limited to mid-level leadership roles. Several barriers prevent women from accessing top leadership positions. Cultural traditions that see men as natural leaders are the strongest barrier. Selective interpretation of Bible passages is another barrier. Lack of female mentors and lack of promotion by male leaders also play important roles. The statistical analysis confirmed that both theological beliefs and cultural norms have significant relationships with women's leadership. The feminist theological hermeneutic framework helped to explain these findings. It showed that cultural patriarchy influences how people read the Bible. It also showed that changing beliefs is easier than changing structures. The situation in Plateau State is a challenge to the church. The church claims to believe in equality in Christ. But its practices often contradict this belief. Addressing this issue requires intentional action at multiple levels.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Denominations in Plateau State should develop clear policies on women's leadership. These policies should be based on careful biblical study. They should be communicated clearly to all churches. Ambiguity allows cultural norms to fill the gap. Clear policies give local pastors and church boards guidance.
2. Theological schools in Plateau State should review their curricula. They should ensure that students are taught about women in the Bible. They should learn about the cultural contexts of restrictive passages. They should also learn about the history of women in the church. This education will produce pastors who support women's leadership.

3. Churches should create formal mentorship programs for women. Young women with leadership potential should be paired with experienced women leaders. They should also be paired with supportive male leaders. Mentorship provides guidance, encouragement, and role models.
4. Church leaders should intentionally preach and teach about women's leadership. Sermons and Bible studies should highlight biblical examples of women leaders. This teaching will gradually change cultural attitudes. It will show church members that supporting women's leadership is biblical.
5. Denominations should set measurable goals for increasing women in leadership. For example, a denomination might aim to have women as 30% of elders within five years. Goals should be specific, measurable, and time-bound. Progress should be tracked and reported publicly. Accountability drives change.

References

- Akinade, A. E. (2019). Theological education and the formation of gender attitudes in Nigerian seminaries. *African Journal of Theological Studies*, 12(2), 45-62.
- Bauckham, R. (2019). *Gospel women: Studies of the named women in the gospels*. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Dawson, J. (2021). Christianity and culture in Plateau State: A historical overview. *Nigerian Journal of Religious Studies*, 18(1), 33-51.
- Gbadegesin, O. (2021). Complementarianism and egalitarianism in Nigerian theological education. *West African Journal of Theology*, 9(3), 78-95.
- Gbote, E. Z. (2022). Women in ministry: A study of Pentecostal churches in northern Nigeria. *Journal of African Christianity*, 15(4), 112-130.
- Köstenberger, A. J., & Köstenberger, M. E. (2020). **Women in the church: An analysis and application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15**. Crossway Books.
- Kumuyi, D. (2021). Barriers to women's leadership in Nigerian churches. *African Ecclesiastical Review*, 63(2), 201-220.
- Labeodan, H. A. (2021). Culture, gender, and church leadership in Yoruba Christianity. *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 52(1), 88-107.
- Magaji, S. (2020). Traditional gender roles and their impact on church life in central Nigeria. *Studies in Nigerian Culture*, 14(2), 55-74.
- Mburu, E. (2019). *African women and church leadership: A case study of Kenya*. Langham Monographs.
- Oduyoye, M. A. (2019). *Introducing African women's theology*. Sheffield Academic Press.
- Okure, T. (2020). Reading the Bible with African women's eyes. *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, 7(2), 34-52.
- Oluwaseun, T. (2022). Galatians 3:28 and the case for women's ordination in Africa. *Biblical Interpretation in Africa*, 11(1), 67-84.
- Pypłacz, J. (2020). Women's leadership in the early church and its implications for today. *Theological Review*, 45(3), 123-142.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (1983). *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins*. Crossroad Publishing.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (1993). *Discipleship of equals: A critical feminist ekklesia-logy of liberation*. Crossroad Publishing.