

Women in Management Positions: A Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda

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Abstract: Throughout history, there has been an idea that women had to follow orders, which caused them to be kept in subordinate positions even after they entered the labor market; fortunately, during the last few decades, research focused on gender and female leadership has increased substantially. This has facilitated the visibility of women's potential in top positions in organizations around the world. It has been proven that the presence of women on boards of directors' benefits organizations because it allows them to have a wider diversity of talent for business management. The present study aimed to analyze theoretical and empirical studies on the factors that facilitate women's access to board positions between 2017 and 2022. This systematic review was conducted based on the PRISMA statement strategy of articles in the Proquest, Ebsco, ScienceDirect and Scopus databases. Articles published between the indicated years were selected, in Spanish and English, using inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a subsequent critical analysis of the articles obtained. A total of 34 articles were included from which the corresponding results were extracted. The results show that there is a greater amount of research on the subject in European and North American countries, published almost entirely in English. And according to the analysis, the factors that facilitate women's access to board positions can be divided into political types, such as rules, regulations and quotas, cultural factors such as support for women, equal opportunities and gender equity, organizational factors such as organizational culture, policies, practices and training programs, and social factors such as media visibility, the presence of mentors and partner support. The research concludes that the most investigated factors were political, as these factors increase the number of women on boards in the short term; however, it's also necessary to highlight the importance of a fusion with social, cultural, and organizational factors to achieve long-term improvement; as well as the commitment of all the agents that interact in the professional life of women. This paper will contribute to future scientific research on women's access to board positions.

Key words: Gender diversity, Gender equity, Female leadership, Women on top, Business management

1. Introduction

The presence of women in board positions has made some progress in recent years (Kowalewska, 2020). This is expressed by De Vita and Magliocco (2018) who mention that many countries have made efforts to overcome barriers to advancement to senior corporate management in pursuit of equal gender representation on boards. As more countries seek to join the quest for greater diversity in the labor sector, it represents progress towards the long-awaited equal opportunities for women (Nae, 2022). Among the progress made, Scandinavian countries stand out as leading the list when it comes to female representation in board positions. In 2018, the European Institute for Gender Equality indicated that women were positioned in 40% of Norwegian corporate boards (Kowalewska, 2020).

Addressing this issue through scientific research can help identify problems and uncover potential avenues that can facilitate obtaining more diverse boards. The publication of research analyzing the existing theory of women on boards also contributes to future research examining the scope and future improvement of women's leadership and increasing women's representation on boards.

1.1 Women in Board Positions Worldwide

Jurisdictions around the world have expressed the importance of women's participation in decision-making positions, both within government and in corporations. Because many studies have mentioned that the presence of women on boards adds value to a firm, as stated by Ismail et al. (2019) who mention that it's important to prioritize the presence of women in board positions due to the benefits they bring to companies. Among them are better corporate governance practices, better company performance, innovation, strong orientation towards stakeholders and corporate social responsibility (Brieger et al., 2019). In the absence of female participation within boards Lewellyn and Muller (2020) point out that there would be ethical and financial implications. Recent studies have shown that lack of gender diversity in boardrooms can lead to less effective

governance and ethical violations, such as fraud and financial underperformance. But for now, this progress has proven to be minimal as data continues to reflect a low representation of women on boards. This underrepresentation turns out to be a global issue (Peña et al., 2022).

Regarding the issue Huang et al. (2020) mention that gender diversity on corporate boards has been noticeable lately but it's far from being gender balanced. Osi and Teng (2021) indicate that UNESCO in 2017, reported that globally gender equity in leadership positions wasn't visualized, demonstrated by the absence of women in board positions within Asian organizations. According to data indicated by Centrum PUCP et al. (2018) a 2018 study published by Grant Thornton stated that the average percentage of women in board positions was 24% globally, the regions leading participation were Eastern Europe (36%), Latin America (30%), and the EU (27%). In Latin America, the country with the greatest progress in female participation was Mexico. And in the case of Peru, in 2018 the participation of women in managerial positions reached 9.2%, caused to some extent by a reduction in the number of directors. These data show that, although the participation of women on boards has increased over the years, it still doesn't carry much weight because it doesn't represent even a third of the positions on global boards.

1.2 Barriers in Women's Access to Board Positions

There are barriers that make it impossible or difficult for women to advance to board positions, such as sociocultural factor, the effect of social status and the glass ceiling influence female participation in the private sector (Al et al., 2020). Nae (2022) details that gender stereotypes for leadership within the corporate culture, lack of wellness programs for working women, and ingrained cultural ideas about the role of women in families are some of the barriers that limit women. Osi and Teng (2021) stated that gender stereotypes hindered women's advancement in the work sector and created a bias in the organizational culture, underestimated women's capacity, and creates a refusal by companies to promoted them. Halrynjo and Blair (2021) explain that there is gender favoritism when board appointments are made, inferring that today's traditionally male-dominated boards may be an obstacle to women's advancement to positions such as board chairs. There are also cultural barriers that derive not only from factors external to women, but also from women's behavior. Since, by imposing submissive behavior, women may be less inclined to assume leadership positions (Kowalewska, 2020). Maida and Weber (2022) expressed that the culture where sexism predominates could prevent a real change in organizations even by establishing a gender quota in the boards.

2. Methodology

A systematic literature review was performed based on the PRISMA Statement (Hutton et al., 2016) where clear and homogeneous data were obtained (Garcia, 2015). The databases Ebsco, Proquest, ScienceDirect and Scopus were selected because higher quality articles were found. The set of keywords was used for the search: [(women on boards) or (women and board and access)].

As can be seen in figure 1 with the PRISMA statement. For the identification process a total of 6,796,649 results were obtained. The inclusion criteria were subject area or sub-area, full text, open access, peer-reviewed or refereed publications, date of publication, type of source, and type of document. The exclusion factors were database filter, subject or matter filter, thesaurus term and language. Finally, the delete of duplicates in Excel. For the screening, were considered titles that contained the terms "women", "female" or "gender diversity" and "board". In terms of eligibility, the abstract, key words and methodology were analyzed, and the content was checked to see if it was in line with the research topic. Finally, 34 records were included in the analysis.

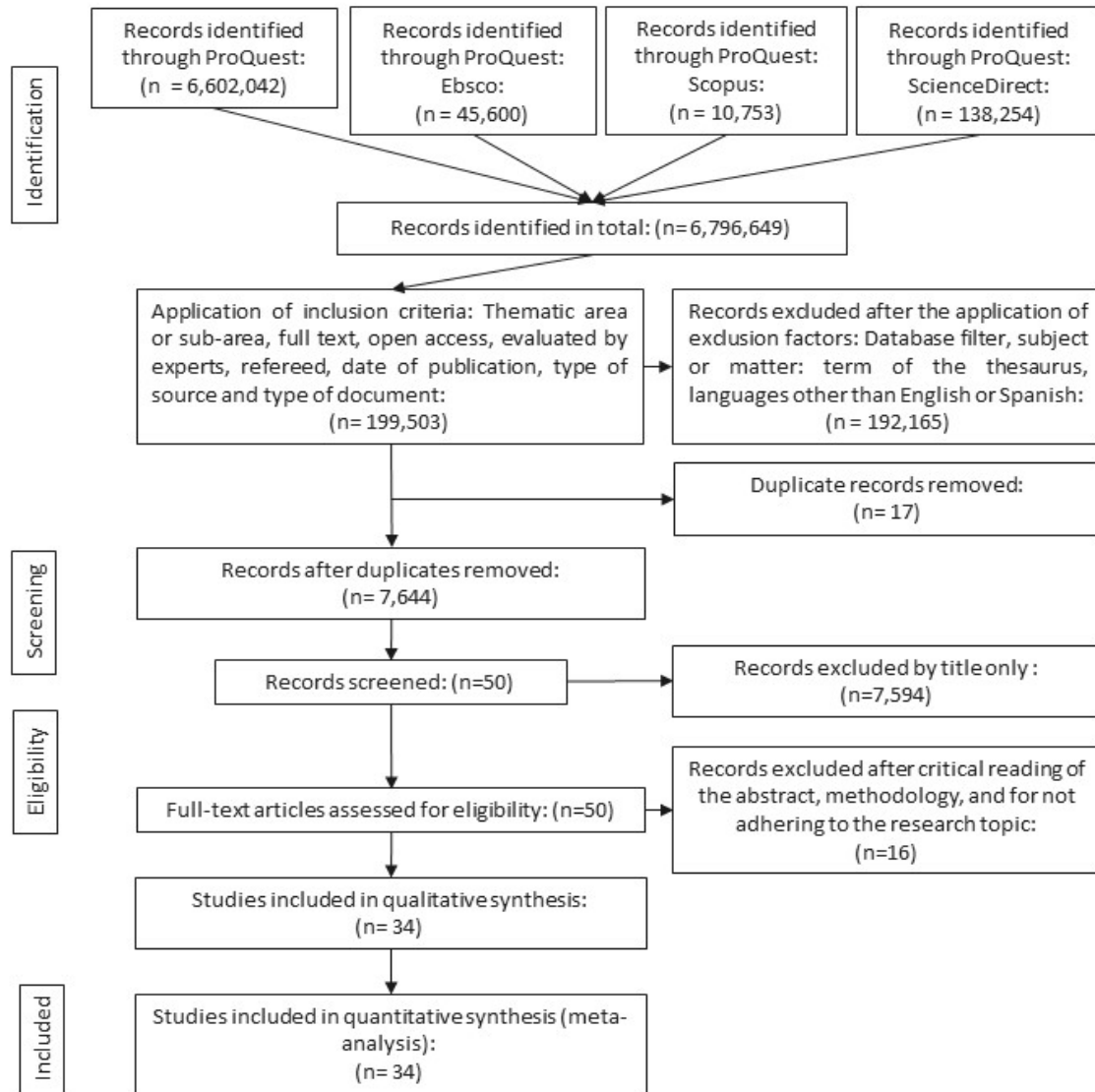


Figure 1: PRISMA Statement

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Analysis of Articles

About the distribution of articles by database, the number of articles found in each of the four databases used: Ebsco, Proquest, ScienceDirect and Scopus. To identify the databases that may be most useful for searching for articles related to women in directories for future projects. Out of a universe of 34 scientific articles reviewed, the main databases were Proquest and Scopus with 41% each and the other two databases were Ebsco and ScienceDirect with 9% each. This suggests that Scopus and Proquest were the most used databases for publications related to gender equity and women's participation in boards.

Figure 2 details the distribution of articles by publication year, with the purpose of identifying the frequencies in the interest about the subject that it had during the period studied. These correspond to the period from 2017 to 2022. The year in which the highest number of scientific articles were published was in 2021 with 32%. 21% were published in 2020. In the year 2019 the 15% were published, in the years 2018 and 2022 the 12% were published and finally for 2017 were 9%. The number of publications made in 2021 exceeded three times the amount published in 2017, and that every year since 2017 and except for 2022, there has been an increase in the publication of articles. This could mean that interest in women's access to board positions has been increasing among researchers around the world over the past five years.

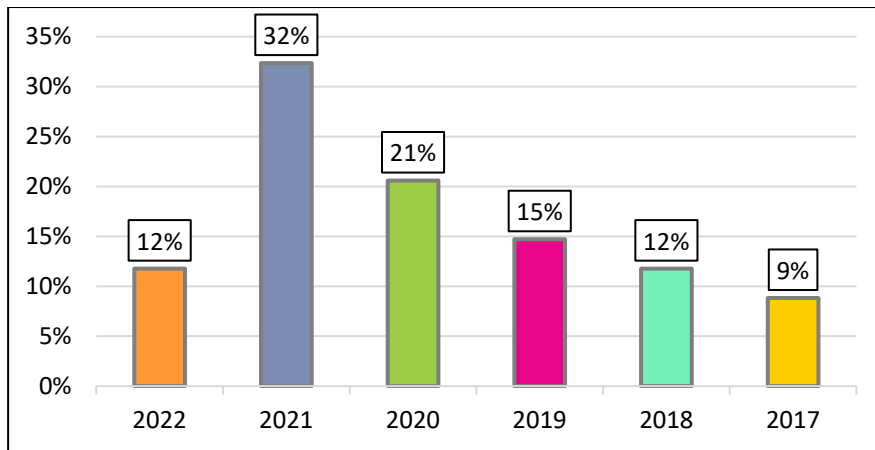


Figure 2: Distribution of Articles by Publication Year

Regarding the language of the articles published in English and Spanish. To identify the language in which most of the articles are useful for future research; of these 34 articles, 97% were in English and only 3% were published in Spanish. This could be interpreted as not publishing a considerable number of articles and scientific research on the subject in Latin American or Spanish-speaking journals, which could be a limitation for future research focusing on the context of a country or sector within Latin America.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of articles by continent studied. It's important to identify which were the contexts from which there is the greatest scientific literature on women in directories. Among them, 56% studied the European context, 18% the North American reality and the worldwide level respectively, 12% the Asian continent, and 3% studied the South American context. These results are consistent with those found in the previous figure, which shows a lack of research on women's access to board positions in the context of South American countries. This could be due to a long history of a sexist culture of which some ideologies still prevail that could be hindering the advancement of gender equity in leadership positions.

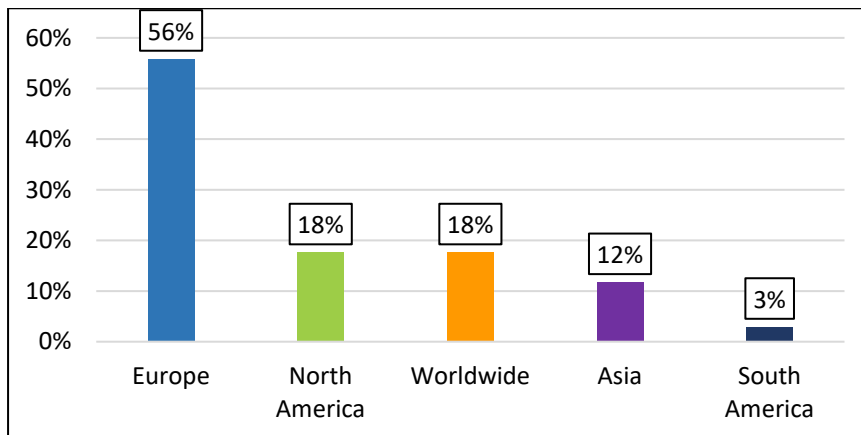


Figure 3: Distribution of Articles by Continent Studied

Figure 4 shows the countries of affiliation of the journals where these articles were published to identify the countries in which there are the largest number of magazines where they investigated women's access in directories. The United Kingdom is the country with the highest number of journals touching the research topic in the selected period with 41%, followed by the United States with 26%, and the Netherlands with 18%. Switzerland, Spain, Poland, Denmark, and Malaysia present only 3% each. The results are in line with what was previously established. This shows that European and North American countries are indeed actively researching women's access to board positions and gender equity.

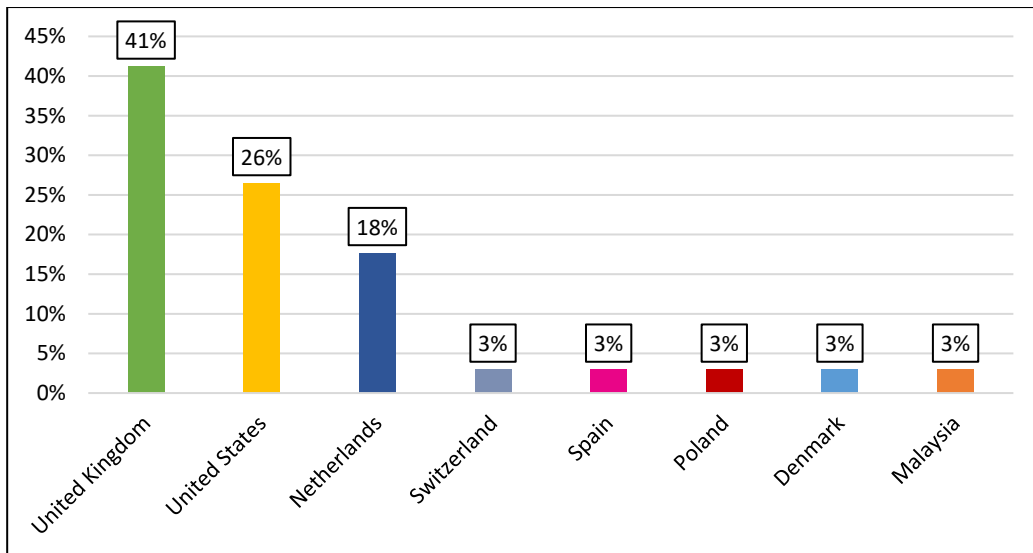


Figure 4: Countries of Affiliation of the Journals Corresponding to the Scientific Articles

3.2 Overall Analysis of Articles

Regarding the type of approach used in the selected articles, there were 41% qualitative and 59% mixed articles. This is due to the nature of the research topic, since it's oriented towards describing factors and characteristics, as well as describing motives and circumstances regarding the factors of women's access to board positions.

Table 1 presents the factors studied in the selected articles, which can be divided into 4 categories. Among them, "Political" factors were studied by 53%, "Organizational" by 35%, "Social" in 26% and "Cultural" by 18%. Of which, the 26% studied two of the factors and 3% studied three of the factors, but the vast majority of 71% focused on only one type of factors. The extensive investigation of political factors can be based on the actions that countries are taking to guarantee and facilitate the access of women to leadership positions, these actions such as female empowerment policies and the application of mandatory quotas to public and private companies have occurred during the last decade and have attracted the interest of researchers.

Table 1: Factors Studied in Selected Articles

Factors	Quantity
Political	53%
Organizational	35%
Social	26%
Cultural	18%

Table 2 presents the most used definitions in the articles. Among the results obtained, it was distinguished that the term "Board" was present in 44% of the articles, followed by "Directive board" with 15%, "Management board" with 12%, "Corporate directory" with 9%, "Boardroom" and "Corporate board" with 6% and the definitions of "Directive council", "General management" and "Corporate governance" with 3% each. It can be observed that the researchers handle different definitions of what boards of directors are, this due to different organizational realities around the world but which finally refer to the highest positions in an organization. The term "Board" has a broader concept than those that follow it, which could be the reason why it's presented more frequently in the articles that investigate this topic.

Table 2: Definitions Most Used in Selected Articles

Definition	Quantity
Board	44%
Directive board	15%
Management board	12%

Definition	Quantity
Corporate directory	9%
Corporate board	6%
Boardroom	6%
Directive council	3%
General management	3%
Corporate governance	3%

In table 3 you can see the most used terms in the 34 scientific articles, 10 were identified. The most used was "Woman" in 100% of the articles, "Gender" in 94%, "Diversity" in 82% and "Country" in 47%. From these results, it can be interpreted that when talking about women and gender within the organizational context, this is easily related to the concept of board diversity. The term "Country" reflects the researchers' interest in focusing on a national reality, since each country has a "Culture" that is different and independent from others. Another term that is repeated is "Quota", this refers to the mandatory and voluntary quotas that have been raised through past research as a possible access factor for women in board positions.

Table 3: Most Used Terms in Selected Articles

Term	Quantity
Woman	100%
Gender	94%
Diversity	82%
Country	47%
Quota	41%
Position	38%
Culture	35%
Social	29%
Regulation	26%
Directory	21%

Table 4 presents the definitions used for the different types of factors. Among the main cultural factors are equal opportunity and gender equality. Among the organizational factors are policies, practices, and organizational culture. The most frequent within the political type were regulations and quotas, both mandatory and voluntary. And in the main social factors are civic norms, and the development of business skills, capabilities, and leadership. Researchers have proposed a wide variety of factors that are involved in women's career paths and that can influence their access to boards of directors.

Table 4: Definitions Used for the Different Types of Factors

Cultural	Organizational	Political	Social
Support for women	Organizational policies	Standards	Women's capacity
Equal opportunities	Organizational practices	Regulations	Civic norms
Promotion of women	Orientation programs	Mandatory dues	Less gender stereotypes
Gender diversity	Social capital	Voluntary quotas	Willingness to lead
Gender equality	Organizational culture	Policies	Business skills
Power distance	Code of good governance	Institutions	Media visibility
Individualism	Voluntary initiative	Reforms	Presence of mentors
Indulgence	Organizational values	Mandates	Partner support

In the systematic review conducted on the 34 articles published in the period 2017-2022, it was found that the access factors for women in board positions were mostly investigated in Europe and North America. The factors identified were classified according to the environment in which they apply: cultural, organizational, political, and social. This is in line with authors (Cabeza et al., 2019; Joecks, 2020; Maida and Weber, 2022; Osi and Teng, 2021; Pucheta et al., 2021; Ricks, 2018) who point to cultural factors such as the importance of equal gender opportunities, promotion of women in the business environment and support for gender diversity in board positions. Authors (Afzali et al., 2021; Blommaert and Van den Brink, 2020; Chan et al., 2021; Chen and Houser, 2019; Haldar et al., 2020; Halliday et al., 2021; Halrynjo and Blair, 2021; Kirsch, 2022; Kowalewska, 2021; Mateos de Cabo et al., 2022; Mensi et al., 2021; Osi and Teng, 2021) that investigated the functioning of salient organizational factors such as board culture, practices, policies, orientation programs and codes of good governance. On policies, the authors (Brieger et al., 2019; Cabeza et al., 2019; Dewally et al., 2017; De Vita and Magliocco, 2018; Foster, 2017; Heller and Gabaldon, 2018; Huang et al., 2020; Kowalewska, 2020 and 2021; Lewellyn and Muller, 2020; Maida and Weber, 2022; Martínez et al., 2020; Mateos de Cabo et al., 2019; Seierstad et al., 2017; Seierstad et al., 2021; Sharda, 2019; Thams et al., 2018; Wawryszak, 2021) focused on mandatory quotas, voluntary quotas, regulations, and policies. And authors (Afzali et al., 2021; Blommaert and Van den Brink, 2020; Brieger et al., 2019; Chen and Houser, 2019; Goyal et al., 2021; Halrynjo and Blair, 2021; Osi and Teng, 2021; Peña et al., 2022; Ricks, 2018) who pointed to social factors such as civic norms, mainly in respect for women, reduction of gender stereotypes, leadership in women and business skills development. The findings follow the line of results reported by external studies (Doldor et al., 2012; European Parliament, 2021) that point out the importance of the combination of these factors for the identification of measures to be taken and the long-term pursuit of gender equity. In comparison to that mentioned by (Deloitte, 2022; Gregorič et al., 2017; ILO, 2020; Smith, 2018) who mention that factors sometimes bring a negative effect on organizations, or that, even applying various combinations of factors in a country, it may remain with low or no representation of women on boards. They also suggest that mandatory factors may even be evaded by organizations and wouldn't really be beneficial for women.

4. Conclusions

Among the findings obtained, it can be indicated that databases such as Scopus and Proquest have a greater number of articles that provide useful information for research related to women's access to board positions. It could be seen that there has been an increase in the interest of researchers around the world with respect to the topic studied. It was reflected in European and North American countries, and their search to create measures that allow women to obtain a better representation in directories. The studied factors are cultural, organizational, political, and social. The most studied were the political ones, because they are more effective in increasing the number of women on boards in a shorter period. These factors should be employed once the country has been analyzed, and the only way to bring about long-term change is to use them in tandem. This also requires the commitment of change agents such as government, society, organizations, and women themselves. The identification of the factors will allow future researchers to have more specific knowledge of the possible promoters of greater gender diversity on boards of directors.

Among the articles studied, it was possible to note limitations such as a clear lack of study of the subject applied to the South American reality. Therefore, for future empirical studies it may be useful to conduct research on South American countries to have a broader perspective on the different contexts in which the topic is developed. The language was also a limitation, it should be encouraged to conduct future research in Spanish to help increase the sources of information on the topic in the Spanish-speaking scientific literature.

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