



The Practices and Challenges of Implementing Gender-based Affirmative Action in Public Universities of Ethiopia

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Abstract

Women constitute fifty percent of Ethiopia's population, yet their participation in higher education affairs is strikingly low. Thus, to redress past oppressive practices and address inequalities and discrimination, gender-based affirmative action is being practiced in higher education institutions. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the status and challenges of implementing gender-based affirmative action in public universities of Ethiopia. To achieve this aim, five public universities, namely Dilla University, Hawassa University, Bule Hora University, Walayta Sodo University, and Madda Walabu University, were purposively selected. The necessary data for this study were gathered through three data collection instruments: questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, from academic staff, gender office directors, and academic leaders (i.e., vice presidents, deans, and directors) of the universities. The data gathered were examined using both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. Following the study, it was found that although the universities under investigation had gender-based affirmative action policies, they were not adequately implemented. Numerous barriers, such as socio-cultural factors, individual/self-factors (i.e., lack of self-confidence), and policy factors, have significantly affected their effective implementation. It was also recommended that, to increase the visibility of women in universities, preference should be given to deserving female academics through recruitment, scholarships, research grants, leadership positions, promotions, job transfers, and training through affirmative action. Moreover, the universities' leaders and other concerned bodies should make tireless efforts to alleviate, or at least minimize, obstacles that hinder the effective implementation of gender-based affirmative action.

1 Introduction

Modern globalization has led nearly every nation worldwide to adopt and adhere to international laws promoting gender equity and equality principles (Kaimenyi, Kinya, and Chege, 2013). Regionally, the Maputo Protocol, also known as the African Women's Protocol, was adopted in July 2003 in Mozambique by members of the African Union (AU). It mandates that signatory parties undertake affirmative measures to ensure women have the

same opportunities to engage in political life (Yasin, 2013). Ethiopia is a signatory to both global and regional gender equality conventions and has incorporated the provisions of these conventions into its Federal Constitution (FDRE Constitution, 1995). Particularly, Articles 25 and 35 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia explicitly specify the rights of women.

As a measure to promote gender equity, affirmative action was incorporated into Ethiopia's education

and training policy in 1994, shortly after the EPRDF regime assumed power. To facilitate its practical application, the constitutional provisions on affirmative action have mandated that it be integrated into policies and laws, enabling implementation in particular situations (FDRE, 2015). Hence, as a means to compensate for past discrimination against women, affirmative action was also supported by university management. To do so, Ethiopia has established goals to enhance the presence of female academics in universities, aiming for them to constitute 20% of the academic staff by 2015. Despite this, women's representation in academic leadership in public universities is only 7.1%, which is far below the critical mass (30%) minimum threshold recommended (Gojjam and Singh, 2015). Therefore, the higher education gender imbalance is acute in virtually all universities in Ethiopia.

The absence of transparency and well-defined communication channels in executing this strategy was identified as a barrier to the effectiveness of the entire implementation process (Chitsamatanga, 2020). Moreover, from the researchers' experience, it is common to observe uneven implementation of gender-based affirmative action, which sometimes depends on the will and interest of the committees in charge of recruitment and selection, delegation to leadership, scholarship allocation, and research grant decisions. That is why women employees in Ethiopian higher education institutions are behind their male counterparts in terms of employment, leadership, access to scholarships, and competition for research grants (Education Strategic Center, 2015). Consequently, the Global Gender Gap Index (2013) ranked Ethiopia 118th out of 136 countries on the overall gender gap measurement.

There are scant research studies nationwide on gender-based affirmative action (GBAA), and this, coupled with the irregularity of its implementation, has not narrowed or halted the gender gap in enrolment, employment, and leadership in higher education institutions. Hence, there is a need for further research. This is the underlying reason that has motivated the researchers to conduct this study. Accordingly, this study aims to assess the status and challenges of implementing gender-based affirmative action for women academic staff in public

universities of Ethiopia. To this end, this research addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent are gender-based affirmative action policies implemented to support women academic staff in public universities?
2. What are the challenges that impede the effective implementation of gender-based affirmative action for women academic staff in public universities?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Affirmative Action

Affirmative action is described as a policy aimed at redressing past injustices experienced by women, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups (Gu, McFerran, Aquino, & Kim, 2014). Likewise, Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) characterize affirmative action as proactive measures to enhance the representation of women in employment and educational opportunities from which they have been historically barred. Consequently, affirmative action serves as a strategy for preventing and eradicating discrimination.

Sabbagh (2011) indicates that affirmative action policies encompass a wide range of areas and sectors, such as university or professional school admissions, employment opportunities, promotions, public contracts, business loans, as well as rights related to buying, selling, or utilizing land.

Affirmative action encompasses measures such as quotas, preferential employment practices, scholarships for minorities, diversity initiatives, reverse discrimination, positive discrimination, compensatory discrimination, protective discrimination, and reservation-based discrimination. All these seek to execute corrective measures and strategies that safeguard the interests of historically disadvantaged sections of society and bring them to participate with the rest of the population by ensuring equal opportunity (Selam, 2017). Therefore, gender-based affirmative action can be understood as policies and practices aimed at increasing opportunities for women and other minorities to address historical inequalities and discrimination.

2.2 The Rationale for GBAA in Universities

Gender-based affirmative action is implemented to promote equality and address historical and systemic disparities faced by women and gender minorities. It aims to create a level playing field in education, employment, and other areas by providing preferential opportunities. According to Bhopal (2013), gender-based affirmative action helps to reduce gender inequality and empower marginalized groups, fostering social justice and diversity.

Research indicates that such affirmative actions can positively influence gender parity among university instructors. For example, Klasen and Clots-Figuera (2018) highlight that gender quotas and affirmative policies can significantly strengthen women's representation in academia, leading to more diverse and inclusive educational environments. Additionally, researchers such as Joshi *et al.* (2015) emphasize that gender-based affirmative action can enhance the career progression of women in higher education, though it may also encounter resistance and challenges related to perceptions of fairness. Therefore, gender-based affirmative action in the context of university instructors aims to advance gender equality and overcome historical inequalities in academia. It encompasses strategies and procedures designed to elevate the representation of underrepresented genders, typically women, in faculty positions.

2.3 The Implementation of Gender-Based Affirmative Action

Ethiopia's adoption of gender-focused affirmative action has made significant progress, though challenges remain. Ethiopia has introduced a range of policies designed to enhance gender equality and boost women's involvement in political, economic, and social domains. The country has been acknowledged for its elevated level of female representation, which exceeded 30% in the Federal Parliament in recent years (Ethiopian Parliament, 2021). Both the government and civil society organizations have launched initiatives to enhance women's opportunities for education, employment, and leadership roles. Nonetheless, researchers point out that, despite these initiatives, gender disparities persist in rural areas, in specific sectors,

and within traditional social frameworks. Gaps in execution, cultural hurdles, and limitations in resources persist as challenges to fully achieving gender equality objectives (Abirha, 2020).

The application of gender-focused affirmative action in Ethiopian universities has also been a developing policy initiative aimed at advancing gender equality and enhancing women's involvement in higher education. Tsegaye (2018) highlights that Ethiopian universities have implemented affirmative action policies to enhance women's admission and involvement, but the actual implementation varies across institutions, with some making significant progress while others lag behind. Similarly, a report by the Ethiopian Higher Education Strategy (2017) notes that although gender parity has improved, there remains a gap in leadership and academic representation of women in Ethiopian universities.

2.4 Factors Affecting the Implementation of Gender-Based Affirmative Action

Recent research studies highlight that several key elements influence the effective implementation of gender-based affirmative action. Institutional factors, sociocultural factors, policy-related factors, and individual (self-imposed) factors can considerably affect gender-based affirmative action interventions. These factors influence how GBAA programs are designed, implemented, and received within communities.

2.4.1 Socio-cultural Factors

Regarding how this factor affects gender-based affirmative action, a study by Tarekegne (2018) found that deep-rooted cultural beliefs and societal norms often hinder the successful execution of gender-focused affirmative action policies in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Similarly, Kumar and Patel (2020) claim that cultural norms, beliefs, and practices shape perceptions of gender, impacting gender-based affirmative action. Bhopal *et al.* (2022) also emphasize the role of societal gender norms and stereotypes in shaping the success of affirmative action policies. They argue that deeply ingrained cultural attitudes can either facilitate or hinder gender equality initiatives.

2.4.2 Institutional Factors

Institutional structures and resources can also either facilitate or hinder GBAA efforts (Johnson & Smith, 2018). Similarly, Acker (2006) underscored that a lack of institutional support often results in superficial compliance rather than substantive change. He also argued that organizational cultures resistant to change undermine affirmative action initiatives. This finding also aligns with Kelleher and Miller (2000), who underscored that the presence of supportive institutional frameworks and clear policies facilitates GBAA implementation, while bureaucratic inertia and lack of clarity hinder progress.

2.4.3 Individual Factors

Individual (self-imposed) perceptions, awareness, and biases of women beneficiaries influence gender-based affirmative action outcomes (Liu & Martinez, 2021). Internalized gender stereotypes and low self-esteem can discourage women from pursuing opportunities (Bandura, 1991; Eagly & Wood, 2012). Women's willingness to challenge gender norms is also influenced by societal support and personal resilience. Consistent with these findings, Buchmann and DiPrete (2006) also found that opposition from women themselves, who view affirmative action as a threat to their status, can impede GBAA implementation.

2.4.4 Policy-Related Factors

Government policies and legal frameworks can support or restrict the implementation of gender-based affirmative action (UN Women, 2019). Clear, well-resourced policies with specific targets and accountability mechanisms are more effective. Conversely, policies lacking enforcement provisions or political will tend to be ineffective for the implementation of GBAA (Krook & O'Brien, 2012). Similarly, Moghadam (2005) underlined that robust legal provisions and policy clarity are necessary to legitimize and operationalize affirmative action and vice versa. Consistent with this, Basu (2010) found that legal frameworks that explicitly mandate gender equality and anti-discrimination laws can facilitate the adoption and enforcement of gender-based affirmative action policies.

As Archibong, Uduak, Utam, and Kingsley (2023) note, several obstacles have been recognized as hindering the adoption of gender-based affirmative action. Some of these challenges are shared across multiple countries, while others are specific to certain contexts. These obstacles encompass limited financial resources, reluctance among target groups to get involved, insufficient support from senior management and leaders, lack of backing from line managers, and significant resistance or skepticism from employees.

Another fundamental factor that affects women-based affirmative action is insufficient training in executing affirmative action programs (April & Govender, 2022). Furthermore, Okedele (2021) confirms that leadership in an organization influences how affirmative action is carried out. This means that if senior leaders are reluctant to follow the affirmative action policy, its enforcement may be hindered. Moreover, Archibong, Uduak, Utam, and Kingsley (2023) reported that a lack of support from colleagues, or opposition from management, who regard their equality obligations as mere formalities, presents significant barriers to engagement in affirmative action measures.

2.5 Gaps in the Literature

Various studies have been carried out on affirmative action for ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, religious minorities, and other beneficiaries to address historical inequalities. For instance, Yilma (2017) conducted a study on tokenism and the representation of ethnic minorities and found the overrepresentation of dominant groups within minority categories.

Alemu and Mekonnen (2020) conducted a study on disability and affirmative action in Ethiopia and found that efforts are being made to improve access and opportunities for persons with disabilities through affirmative action policies. Bekele (2018) also conducted a study on religious minorities and political inclusion in Ethiopia and found limited success due to socio-political challenges and resistance, although some positive steps have been observed. Despite this, little research emphasis has been placed on gender-based affirmative action for academic staff within universities. Therefore, this

research extends current knowledge by addressing the overlooked aspect of gender-based affirmative action implementation practices for women academic staff in higher education institutions.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework explains the key concepts and the dependent and independent variables and their interrelationships figuratively to help readers easily synthesize the central tenets of the study (Figure 1).

The below conceptual framework illustrates the re-

lationships between various independent variables and the dependent variable. In this context, the independent variables include socio-cultural factors, individual factors, institutional factors, and policy factors, which are hypothesized to influence the implementation of gender-based affirmative action. The framework posits that these independent variables collectively impact the effectiveness and extent of gender-based affirmative action implementation. Understanding these relationships helps identify key drivers and barriers, guiding strategies to enhance policy effectiveness and promote gender equality within institutional settings.

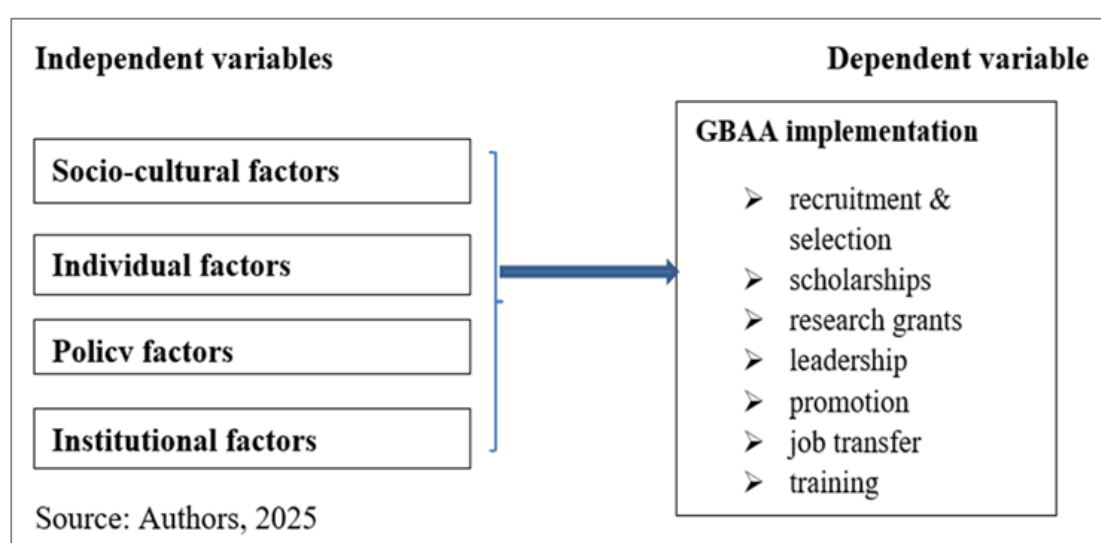


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

To enhance the validity of the research, this study utilized a mixed-methods approach (concurrent), which involves both quantitative and qualitative data. The rationale for using multiple approaches, as per Cresswell (2012), is to leverage the advantages of each method while compensating for their respective weaknesses, resulting in a deeper understanding of research issues than using either approach individually.

3.2 Research Design

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously. Thus, a concurrent

parallel design was employed. Cresswell (2012) indicates that when we are dealing with the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time, we have to use a concurrent parallel design. Therefore, a concurrent parallel design, which allows qualitative and quantitative forms of data to be collected at the same time during the study, was employed, and these data were integrated (triangulated) during interpretation to arrive at a consolidated conclusion.

3.3 Data Sources

With regard to the sources of data, both primary and secondary data were utilized. The primary data were gathered using questionnaires and interviews from academic staff of the universities,

gender office directors, and academic leaders such as vice presidents, deans, and directors. Conversely, additional information was gathered via document analysis from university legislation, operational plans (i.e., quarterly, semi-annual, and annual plans), university-level strategic plans, minutes of the gender office, and the universities' quarterly, semi-annual, and annual performance reports.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

Five universities that are found within a near radius of Dilla University, where the researchers are employed (including Dilla University itself), namely Hawassa University, Bule Hora University, Walayta Sodo University, and Madda Walabu University, were included in this study.

The study utilized a combination of probability sampling, specifically proportional stratified random sampling, where participants were randomly chosen to minimize bias across various strata, and non-probability sampling, namely purposive sampling, to select participants who possess the essential information required for this research. Thus, sample academic staff of the universities were selected from all colleges and departments of the universities under study based on proportional stratified random sampling. Whereas gender office directors and academic leaders such as vice presidents, deans, and directors were selected deliberately because they are thought to be responsible for overseeing and coordinating activities pertaining to the implementation of gender-based affirmative action in their organizations. Thus, of the 6,544 academic staff of the universities under study, 372 respondents were selected based on proportional stratified random sampling.

3.5 Instruments of Data Collection

The data intended for this research were gathered using questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. Quantitative data were collected via closed-ended questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews, open-ended

questionnaires, and document analysis.

3.6 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument's validity was checked through discussion with the gender office director of Dilla University, where the researchers are employed, and with experts in the Institute of Education and Behavioral Sciences of the university.

The pilot test method was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire, and it was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. As a result, the internal consistency rating of the instrument was found to be 0.859, which is good.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As research involving human participants requires careful consideration, ethical clearance was obtained from Dilla University. During the process of filling out the questionnaire, a good rapport was established with the participants to make them comfortable, and they were informed that participation was based on their consent and voluntariness. All the questionnaire and interview data were handled with strict privacy, ensuring the confidential nature of the responses, to which only the researchers had access.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

After the data were collected through the three data collection instruments, they were analyzed using a mixed approach. The data obtained from the closed-ended questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS version 23. Both descriptive statistics (such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (such as independent sample t-tests and multiple linear regression) were used.

The data obtained through interviews, responses from open-ended questionnaire items, and document analysis were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis and quotation. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated to create a holistic picture of the study.

4 Results

Before analysis, the dataset was checked to determine whether it was free from violations of parametric assumptions such as normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance. Thus, the assumptions were fulfilled.

4.1 Gender based Affirmative action policy and its implementation

Table 1: Availability of GBAA policy

Items	Responses	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1 Does the university you work in have affirmative action policy in place?	Yes	190	51.1
	Not sure	163	43.8
	No	19	5.1
	Total	372	100.0
2 Does your university formally communicate you about affirmative action policy of the organization	Yes	102	27.4
	Not sure	102	27.4
	No	168	45.2
	Total	372	100.0
3 Is there a continuous follow-up, monitoring and evaluation of gender based affirmative action implementation in your university?	Yes	66	17.7
	Not sure	223	59.9
	No	83	22.3
	total	372	100.0

In Table 1 above, 190 (51.1%) of the respondents confirmed that the university they work in had affirmative action policies in place, while 163 (43.8%) were not sure, and the remaining 19 (5.1%) respondents indicated that the university they work in did not have an affirmative action policy in place. When analyzing whether their university formally communicated this policy to them, the majority, 168 (45.2%), confirmed that it was not communicated, while 102 (27.4%) respondents confirmed

the reverse or were not sure, respectively. Furthermore, in the last item of the same table, the vast majority, that is, 223 (59.9%) of the respondents, were not sure if there was continuous follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation of gender-based affirmative action implementation, while 83 (22.3%) respondents indicated that it does not take place at all, and the remaining 66 (17.7%) indicated that this practice exists.

Table 2: Implementation levels of gender based affirmative action

S/n	Item	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Hiring quotas	372	2.9651	1.1381
2	Scholarship	372	2.8629	1.16786
3	Research grants	372	2.957	1.13426
4	Leadership position	372	2.8038	1.14769
5	Staff promotion	372	2.7285	1.14404
6	Job Transfer	372	2.629	1.04457
7	On/off the job training	372	2.8656	1.15074
	Weighted mean	372	2.8303	0.8131

Scales: ≤ 1.49 = very low, $1.5 - 2.49$ = low, $2.5 - 3.49$ = average, $3.5 - 4.49$ = high, ≥ 4.5 = very high (Wade, 2006)

As demonstrated in Table 2 above, respondents were asked to what extent their universities take extra steps to apply/implement gender-based affirmative action using a rating scale. Accordingly, with regard to the implementation of areas of GBAA, it was found that special privileges such as hiring quotas, scholarships, research grants, leadership positions, staff promotion, job transfer, and on/off-the-job training were implemented at an average level, as indicated by the mean scores of 2.9651, 2.8629, 2.9570, 2.8038, 2.7285, 2.6290, and 2.8656, respectively. The overall mean score for the implementation of gender-based affirmative action, 2.8303, also indicates that it is implemented at an average level.

The result of the interview was also consistent with

the above findings. In this regard, a sample reflection from one dean/principal is quoted as follows:

“Knowingly or unknowingly, gender policies pertaining to women’s affirmative action are not properly implemented to the extent required. The purpose of the policy and guidelines seems to be insufficiently understood or is being interpreted incorrectly by the officers responsible for implementation. Additionally, there is a lack of uniformity in how the policy is applied (i.e., sometimes it is implemented, and at other times it receives no attention). Therefore, the GBAA policies pertaining to females’ leadership seem to have only paper value, though they are reported by higher officials as if they are effectively implemented.”

Table 3: Comparisons of male and female staffs on the implementation of gender based affirmative action

S/n	Items	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	p-value
1	Implementation of GBAA policy	males	289	2.8596	0.84996	1.489	166.93	0.138
		Females	83	2.7281	0.66357			

P value < 0.05 = statistically significant, p value > 0.05= statistically not significant

As demonstrated in Table 3 above, the mean score (M = 2.8596, SD = 0.84996) of male respondents and (M = 2.7281, SD = 0.66357) of female respondents confirmed that the GBAA policy was implemented at a moderate level. Concerning the result of the independent sample t-test, $t(166.93) = 1.489$, $p = 0.138$, it indicates that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between male and female respondents.

Table 4: Comparisons of leader & non-leader respondents on the implementation of gender based affirmative action

S/n	Items	Leadership status	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	p-value
1	Implementation of GBAA policy	leaders	174	2.9269	0.82225	2.226	370	0.029
		Non-leaders	198	2.7383	0.80067			

P value < 0.05 = statistically significant, p value > 0.05= statistically not significant

As shown in Table 4 above, the mean score (M = 2.9269, SD = 0.82225) of leader respondents and (M = 2.7383, SD = 0.80067) of non-leader respondents confirmed that the GBAA policy was implemented at a medium level. Regarding the result of the independent sample t-test, $t(370) = 2.226$, $p = 0.029$, indicating that there was a statisti-

cally significant difference in the average responses between the leaders and non-leader respondents on the implementation of GBAA. The difference between the reflections of leader and non-leader respondents might be because leader respondents tend to report more positively about their achievement in implementing GBAA.

4.2 Factors affecting the implementation of gender based affirmative action

Table 5: Model summary of multiple regressions

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.251 ^a	0.063	0.053	0.79125

a. Predictors: (Constant), socio-cultural factors, institutional factors, individual factors, policy factors

The model summary in Table 5 above showed that approximately 5.3% of the variance in the dependent variable (GBAA) is explained by the combination of the four independent variables (socio-cultural factors, institutional factors, individual factors, and policy factors).

Table 6: Model fit (ANOVA)

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.514	4	3.879	6.195	.000 ^b
	Residual	229.768	367	0.626		
	Total	245.282	371			

a. Dependent Variable: GBAA implementation

b. Predictors: (Constant), socio-cultural factors, institutional factors, individual factors, policy factors

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(4,367) = 6.195, P < 0.001$, indicating that the predictors collectively explain a significant proportion of the variance in GBAA (Table 6).

Table 7: Significance of the effect

Model		Coefficients ^a			T	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.842	0.214		13.269	0
	institutional factors	0.032	0.074	0.029	0.426	0.671
	individual factors	0.144	0.064	0.136	2.267	0.024
	policy factors	0.295	0.072	0.296	4.117	0
	socio-cultural factors	0.126	0.056	0.138	2.275	0.023

a. Dependent Variable: GBAA implementation

As demonstrated in Table 7, institutional factors have no significant effect on the implementation of gender-based affirmative action, $t(367) = 0.426, p = 0.671$; individual factors have a significant effect on the implementation of gender-based affirmative action, $t(367) = 2.267, p < 0.05$; policy factors have a significant effect on the implementation of GBAA, $t(367) = 4.117, p < 0.05$; and socio-cultural factors have a considerable impact on the execu-

tion of GBAA, $t(367) = 2.275, p < 0.05$. Thus, of the four independent variables, three of them, that is socio-cultural factors, individual (self-factors), and policy factors, significantly affected the execution of GBAA at a 0.05 criterion of statistical significance.

In the interview in this regard, the academic vice president of one of the universities under study re-

vealed the main obstacles that inhibit the operation of GBAA as follows:

“The barriers that affect the implementation of GBAA are not attributed to a single factor. They are multifaceted in nature: lack of coordination, lack of planning, monitoring and evaluation on the implementation of GBAA, lack of aspiration from the women themselves to be beneficiaries of their right of affirmative action, lack of institutional commitment to implement gender-based affirmative action policy, and lack of awareness on the implementation of GBAA, etc., are some of the bottlenecks of GBAA implementation.”

5 Discussion

Although it was not formally communicated to the staff, the universities under study had gender-based affirmative action policies. Similar results have been reported by Teshome (2019), who found that Ethiopian universities have increasingly adopted affirmative action policies aimed at promoting gender equality, recognizing the historical underrepresentation of women in higher education. The failure to formally communicate the GBAA policy to staff in this study is inconsistent with the suggestion of Tesfaye and Mekonnen (2020), who reported that in Ethiopian universities, the success of gender-based affirmative action depends significantly on how well the policies are communicated and understood by all staff members.

It was also found in this study that respondents were not sure whether ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up of gender-based affirmative action were practiced in their university or not. This contradicts the suggestion of Tesfaye and Alemu (2019), who underscored that monitoring and evaluation serve as critical tools to measure the impact of gender-based affirmative actions and promote accountability within Ethiopian higher education institutions.

It was identified that, despite the constitutional provisions (special privileges) of the GBAA policy, it was not effectively implemented. This is reminiscent of findings reported by Abebe (2021), who demonstrated that despite policy efforts, the implementation of gender-based affirmative action

faces challenges rooted in cultural norms and institutional practices. Similarly, a report by the Ethiopian Higher Education Strategy (2017) notes that although gender parity has improved, there remains a gap in leadership and academic representation for women.

Individual (female self-imposed) factors, socio-cultural factors, and policy-related factors significantly affected the implementation of GBAA. The way each factor determines the implementation of GBAA aligns with the findings of different researchers. Tarekegn (2018) found that deep-rooted cultural beliefs and societal norms hinder the successful execution of gender-focused affirmative action policies in Ethiopian higher education. This finding is also consistent with Kumar and Patel (2020), who found that cultural norms, beliefs, and practices shape perceptions of gender, impacting gender-based affirmative action. With regard to the impact of policy-related factors on GBAA, this finding also aligns with UN Women (2019), who stated that government policies and legal frameworks can support or restrict GBAA. Similarly, it is consistent with Krook and O'Brien (2012), who underscored that policies lacking enforcement provisions or political will tend to be ineffective in the implementation of GBAA. The finding also aligns with Kelleher and Miller (2000), who underscored that the presence of supportive institutional frameworks and clear policies facilitates GBAA implementation, while bureaucratic inertia and lack of clarity hinder progress. Moreover, with regard to how individual (female self-imposed) factors affect GBAA implementation, Buchmann and DiPrete (2006) found that opposition from women themselves who view affirmative action as a danger to their status can impede GBAA implementation. Buchmann and DiPrete (2006) further added that opposition from women groups that perceive affirmative action as a threat to their status can impede GBAA implementation.

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which gender-based affirmative action policies are implemented to support women academic staff in the public universities under study and

to identify the challenges that impede the effective implementation of gender-based affirmative action for women academic staff in the public universities. Therefore, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Policies supporting affirmative action were implemented in the universities under study. However, these policies were not formally communicated to university staff. Additionally, it was unclear whether ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up were in place to determine the reasons behind the positive and negative outcomes of gender-based affirmative action practices and activities.
- Despite the international and national campaign for the implementation of GBAA, it was found that constitutional provisions (special privileges) of GBAA such as hiring quotas, scholarships, research grants, leadership positions, staff promotion, job transfer, and on/off-the-job training were not implemented at the expected level. Thus, effective implementation of these areas of GBAA demands further intervention.
- Numerous variables, including individual (female self-imposed) factors, sociocultural factors, policy-related factors, lack of coordination, lack of planning, monitoring and evaluation, and lack of awareness, affected the effective implementation of GBAA. For GBAA to be implemented effectively, it is necessary to make coordinated efforts to alleviate these obstacles.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following actions to be taken by concerned bodies to ensure the effective implementation of GBAA:

- To enhance the visibility of women in universities, it is important to implement practices that prioritize deserving female scholars by offering opportunities in recruitment, scholarships, research funding, leadership roles, promotions, job transfers, and training initiatives through affirmative action.
- Universities should make persistent efforts to increase understanding and shift the perspec-

tives of their community regarding gender-based affirmative action through extensive and ongoing campaigns, advocacy, education, conferences, workshops, and similar initiatives.

- University leaders and other relevant authorities should work tirelessly to reduce or at least minimize the hurdles that obstruct the effective implementation of GBAA.
- There should be ongoing monitoring of the implementation of constitutionally mandated GBAA measures to guarantee women's equality in all organizational activities.
- The Ministry of Education should develop a uniform set of guidelines for implementing GBAA across all higher education institutions.
- There should be a mechanism whereby leaders in charge of overseeing and coordinating GBAA are held accountable for failures in implementation.

Limitations

Although the concept of affirmative action is broader in scope and includes special provisions made for specific groups, including women, individuals with disabilities, and members of minority ethnic communities (i.e., emerging regions), this study was limited to examining gender-based affirmative action practices given to women academic employees of the universities under study. Therefore, future research studies should conduct a comprehensive investigation that addresses all beneficiaries of affirmative action. Moreover, this study was conducted to assess GBAA practices only in public universities. Thus, future studies should consider private universities as well. Although there are many variables that affect the effective implementation of GBAA, this study tested only some of them in the multiple regression model. Thus, future studies should test other variables that may affect GBAA in addition to those included in this study.

Future Research Directions

- The same study should be conducted by other researchers with a wider scope and depth that

incorporates a large sample of universities and all aspects of affirmative action.

- A comparative study should be conducted on the commonalities and differences in implementing GBAA across research universities, applied universities, and comprehensive universities.
- A comprehensive research study that considers all factors affecting GBAA should be conducted.

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Conflict of Interest

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The authors will supply data upon justified request.

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