GENDER EQUALITY IN RECRUITMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Getting equal opportunities in recruitment makes people feel welcomed and valued. It also helps them feel fairly represented, and this forms the base for sustainable employment. This study is a systematic review of 48 peer-reviewed papers on gender equality in recruitment for sustainable employment. The review uses the SPAR-4-SLR method to keep the process clear and reliable. Using the TCM (Theory, Context, Methodology) framework, the study develops a conceptual framework to illustrate how theories, contexts, and methods have been employed in previous research. This approach helps to find gaps in the research and suggest a future research agenda. The findings indicate that bias and stereotypes continue to influence recruitment practices. At the same time, policies, artificial intelligence tools, and representation can support diversity, but only to a limited extent. The study also gives practical suggestions for managers, HR professionals, and organizations to make recruitment more inclusive and supportive of gender equality and sustainable employment.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Recruitment, Sustainable Employment, Sustainability, Hiring, Reduced Inequality

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality in recruitment remains a persistent challenge despite ongoing efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in organizations. Field experiments demonstrate that discrimination in hiring continues to affect women and minority groups. For example, a classic study showed that job applicants with White-sounding names received 50 percent more callbacks for interviews than equally qualified applicants with African American–sounding names, highlighting the influence of implicit bias in recruitment (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Beyond racial cues, gender stereotypes also shape recruitment outcomes. Role Congruity Theory explains that prejudice arises when there is a mismatch between gender stereotypes and the perceived requirements of leadership or professional roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women are often associated with communal traits such as warmth and nurturing, while leadership and many high-status jobs are associated with agentic traits such as assertiveness and dominance. This incongruity can result in women being judged as less suitable for stereotypically male-dominated roles. Recruitment practices themselves may inadvertently reinforce inequality. One pathway is through gendered wording in job advertisements. Gaucher, Friesen, and Kay (2011) found that job ads containing masculine-coded words (e.g., “ambitious,” “dominant”) reduced women’s sense of belonging and interest in applying, whereas feminine-coded words (e.g., “supportive,”

"interpersonal") did not have the same exclusionary effect on men. Similarly, a meta-analysis confirmed that gender stereotypes affect hiring decisions across contexts, with women more likely to face bias in male-typed roles (Koch, D'Mello, & Sackett, 2015). Recruitment systems that rely on traditional evaluation processes can also amplify bias. However, research shows that structured decision-making can mitigate disparities. Bohnet, van Geen, and Bazerman (2016) found that when candidates were evaluated jointly rather than separately, performance information outweighed gender stereotypes, reducing biased outcomes. This suggests that careful design of recruitment systems can play a role in promoting gender equality.

RESEARCH PROCESS

The SPAR-4-SLR framework is well-suited for this review because it provides a transparent and systematic process for carrying out a structured literature review. The topic of *gender equality in recruitment* is broad, involving multiple theories, methods, sectors, and countries. Using SPAR-4-SLR ensures that the review is rigorous, unbiased, and replicable, and it also helps move from a very large set of search results to a smaller, more focused group of high- quality studies that can answer the research question.

SPAR-4-SLR

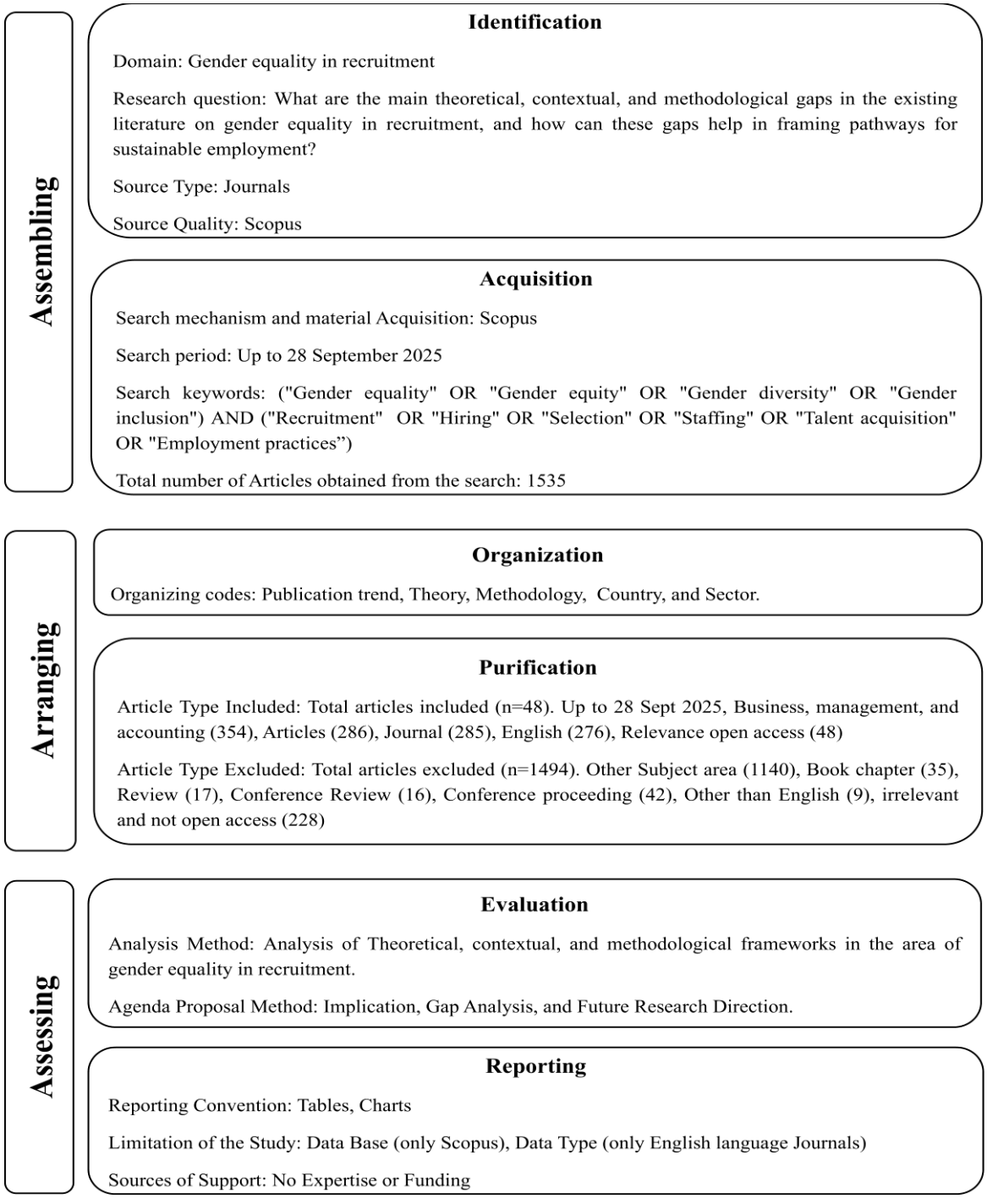
This study used the SPAR-4-SLr approach (see Figure 1). The first stage is assembling, which has two steps: identification and acquisition. Identification involves defining the research domain, formulating the research question, and deciding where to search. In this review, the focus is on gender equality in recruitment, with the key question being: *What are the main theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps in the existing literature on gender equality in recruitment, and how can these gaps help in framing pathways for sustainable employment?*. Journals indexed in Scopus were chosen as the data source.

The acquisition step involves building and applying a search strategy. Keywords such as "gender equality," "gender diversity," "re

arranging, which includes organization and purification. Organization involves sorting the articles and creating a database with key fields such as author, year, journal, country, sector, methods, and theories. This step helps in mapping the literature before detailed screening. Purification is the filtering step where inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied. The review included only peer-reviewed journal articles written in English, related to business and management, relevant to recruitment and gender, and available in full text. Excluded items included book chapters, conference papers, non-English publications, and irrelevant studies. After applying these rules, the dataset was reduced to 48 articles.

The third stage is assessing, which has two steps: evaluation and reporting. Evaluation means carefully analyzing the final set of articles. Data were extracted on country, sector, theory or framework, methodology, data collection, software, analysis techniques, findings, limitations, and suggested future directions. A basic quality assessment was also done, checking whether studies had clear questions, adequate samples, and appropriate methods. Reporting involves presenting the results in a clear and structured way. The findings were summarized in tables and charts, showing patterns across countries, sectors, and methods. Gaps were highlighted, and research directions were suggested. The review also reported its limitations, including reliance on one database (Scopus), English-only articles, and the exclusion of gray literature.

Figure 1: Research Process



Findings

The trend of publications shows that equal opportunity in recruitment has been discussed for a long time. Research in this area has grown more steadily in recent years. A small rise in 2017 relates to the introduction of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals gave more attention to gender equality and decent work. After that, the topic became more visible among researchers. In the past five years, publications have increased more clearly. This reflects the progress women are making in achieving leadership and professional roles. It also shows that awareness of fairness in recruitment is becoming stronger every year.

Theoretical frameworks

The analysis shows that some theories are used many times to explain gender equality in recruitment. The most common are Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the Lack of Fit Model (Heilman, 1983). Both point out that stereotypes and a mismatch between gender roles and job roles create bias in hiring. Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) is also often used. It explains how cultural expectations about men and women shape recruitment decisions. Together, these theories form the base of much research. They highlight how gender stereotypes and role mismatch affect hiring. Another theory that appears often is Signaling Theory. It is used in areas like employer branding, impression management, and job ads. This theory explains how organizations send signals through recruitment practices, such as wording in ads or diversity policies. These signals influence how applicants see the opportunity and decide to apply. Related models like the Attraction Selection Attrition (ASA) model and Person–Organization Fit theory also appear. They explain how organizations and candidates match with each other. The review also found some theories that are used less often but are still important. The Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al.) uses competence and warmth to explain recruiter perceptions. Homologous Reproduction (Kanter, 1977) is seen in studies of coaching and academic hiring. It shows how decision-makers often choose people who are like themselves. Representative Bureaucracy Theory and Symbolic Representation Theory also appear, but mostly in public sector research. A few studies used critical perspectives. Examples are Postcolonial Feminism, Intersectionality, and Foucauldian governmentality. These are not common in recruitment studies, but they add insights about how gender connects with race, religion, and power. Other recent work uses Algorithmic Fairness frameworks and Debiasing approaches. These focus on bias in AI recruitment tools and mark a new area of study. Some studies did not use a formal theory at all. They used ideas like the "business case for diversity" or just described workplace practices and outcomes. These papers give useful practical insights. But without a theory, it is harder to compare them with other studies

Contextual analysis

Contextual analysis explains the setting in which the study was conducted. It usually includes the country where the research took place and the sectors that were examined.

Country

The findings show that most research on gender equality in recruitment comes from a few countries (see Table 1), with the United States leading. Many studies from the U.S. focus on workplace diversity,

recruitment practices, and hiring experiments. The strong presence of U.S.-based research reflects the country's active debates on diversity, affirmative action, and equal employment policies. Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom also contribute heavily. Research from Germany often examines labor markets, recruitment policies, and organizational practices, especially in higher education and public administration. Swedish studies focus on gender equality in leadership, recruitment in creative industries, and academic hiring. In the U.K., the focus is often on equality policies, organizational frameworks, and case studies of recruitment. Together, these European countries provide a strong base of evidence, especially on institutional frameworks and policy-level analysis. Other European countries, such as Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Norway, and Ireland, also appear in the review, though less frequently. These studies often explore specific industries, such as family businesses in Italy, public administration in the Netherlands, and academic recruitment in Switzerland and Ireland. While not as dominant as the U.S. or Germany, they add valuable perspectives from varied cultural and institutional contexts. Research from India also stands out. Several studies from Indian institutions highlight recruitment challenges faced by women, especially in the hospitality and technology sectors. These contributions are important because they bring perspectives from emerging economies where gender inequality in employment remains a major issue. A smaller number of studies come from Australia, Japan, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates. These works provide useful regional diversity. For instance, Japanese research focuses on employment structures and women's participation in the labor market, while UAE studies look at progress in education and employment toward gender equality goals.

Table 1 Countries covered

Country	Count
USA	13
Germany	7
Sweden	5
United Kingdom	5
India	3
Netherlands	3
Italy	2
Norway	2
Australia	1
Ireland	1
Japan	1
Romania	1
Spain	1
Switzerland	1
United Arab Emirates	1
Vietnam	1
Total	**48**

Sectors

The research on gender equality in recruitment covers a wide range of sectors (see Table 2). The most studied areas are technology, higher education, hospitality, and the public sector. These industries dominate because they are either male-dominated fields where women struggle to enter or public institutions where equality policies are closely examined. The technology and STEM sectors appear frequently. Studies here focus on startups, online tech training, IT companies, and technical fields like computing and engineering. These sectors are often male-dominated, and research highlights issues of gender bias, stereotypes, and efforts to create inclusive hiring practices. Closely related are works on online recruitment and AI-based hiring tools, which bring attention to how digital systems may either reduce or reinforce bias. The higher education and academic sector also receives strong attention. Research examines the recruitment of professors, academic fellowships, and leadership appointments in universities across different countries. These studies highlight how gender inequality persists even in knowledge-driven sectors and how policies like transparency, quotas, or evaluation frameworks can support women's representation. The hospitality and tourism industry is another major focus. Many studies analyze recruitment in hotels, tourism firms, and related services. This sector is important because it employs large numbers of women but continues to face challenges such as discrimination, stereotyping, and unequal career opportunities. Some works also compare hospitality with other service industries such as healthcare, banking, and retail. The public sector is widely studied as well, especially in Europe, the United States, and Asia. Research covers civil services, state bureaucracies, government agencies, and public recruitment advertisements. These studies often link to theories of representative bureaucracy and equality in public employment, examining how recruitment policies reflect broader social commitments to fairness. Beyond these dominant fields, several specialized sectors are studied less often but add important insights. For example, sports research looks at hiring practices in intercollegiate athletics and national governing bodies of sport. Media and creative industries provide perspectives on talent management and cultural barriers. Corporate governance and board selection studies explore how gender diversity is addressed in leadership and decision- making positions. Other sectors like construction, mechanical trades, retail, food, financial services, and multinational corporations also appear, though less frequently, showing that gender equality in recruitment is a concern across both traditional and modern industries

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Table 2: Sectors covered

Major Sector	Coverage
Education / Higher Education	Recruitment of professors, academic fellowships (Spain, Switzerland), senior leadership (Ireland, Sweden, Netherlands), and professorial appointments.
Public Administration / Civil Service / Government	Recruitment practices in Germany, Norway, Korea, the USA, SES, and Dutch universities, and transparency in academic recruitment.
Hospitality & Tourism	Recruitment in hotels, tourism industry managers, T&H workforce studies, comparisons with other service industries (retail, healthcare, banking).
Technology & STEM / IT Sector	Cybersecurity startups, IT/Tech firms, ITEC (IT, electronics, computing), STEM employment, LinkedIn/online resume job matching, tech training programs, Fortune 500 recruitment.
Corporate Governance / Boards	Gender diversity in board appointments, board recruitment experiments, governance in sports boards, and national governing bodies.
Sports Sector	NCAA intercollegiate women's sports (assistant coach hiring), national governing bodies of sport recruitment.
Media & Creative Industries	German media sector, digital game industry (Sweden), cultural/creative industries.
General Labor Market / Employment	Non-traditional employment (construction, engineering, trades), COVID-19 labor market impact in Central America, women's re-entry after career breaks, and career development programs.

Methodological frameworks

Most studies on gender equality in recruitment use quantitative methods, with statistical modeling and experiments being the most common. Techniques such as regression analysis (OLS, logistic, fixed effects), mediation analysis, ANOVA, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) appear frequently. These methods are often used with large datasets from surveys, experiments, or secondary sources. They allow researchers to test relationships between gender, recruitment outcomes, and organizational practices in a structured way. Experimental designs are especially common. Many studies use randomized online experiments, vignette-based experiments, eye-tracking, or field experiments in real organizations. This approach helps to measure bias and stereotypes in hiring decisions directly, often by controlling conditions such as candidate gender or job ad wording. Several studies also combine experiments with survey data, strengthening their results through replication.

Another widely used approach is survey research, often through online questionnaires distributed to employees, managers, or students. These surveys are

analyzed with techniques like factor analysis, CFA, path analysis, and regression models. They help to capture attitudes, perceptions, and experiences related to recruitment and gender equality. Secondary data analysis is also important. Large datasets from government reports, organizational records, job advertisements, or online platforms (such as LinkedIn or employer review sites) are analyzed with econometric methods. Computational text analysis, AI-based debiasing techniques, and big data models (e.g., LSTM neural networks, word embeddings) show how digital and algorithmic methods are becoming part of recruitment research. While quantitative methods dominate, the review also shows several qualitative studies. These rely on interviews, discourse analysis, case studies, and thematic coding. They explore contexts like the digital game industry, academic recruitment, or education, offering in-depth insights into how gender and power relations shape recruitment practices. Some qualitative works use critical discourse analysis or feminist perspectives to highlight structural inequalities. A smaller but valuable set of studies uses mixed methods. For example, some combine content analysis of job ads with interviews of recruiters, or survey results with qualitative case studies. These approaches provide a more holistic view by combining statistical evidence with contextual understanding. In terms of research design, the most common are experimental, cross-sectional, analytical, and comparative designs. Experiments dominate when bias and stereotypes are studied, while cross-sectional and analytical designs are used for large surveys or secondary datasets. Comparative and case study approaches appear in contexts such as higher education or public administration, especially when recruitment policies are compared across countries or organizations. Exploratory designs are less frequent but are used in qualitative research to open new questions. Longitudinal and diagnostic designs are rarely seen, showing a gap for future research that could track changes over time.

Discussion

The literature shows that gender bias in recruitment persists. Stereotypes, wording in job ads, evaluation practices, and new technologies all play a role. However, important gaps remain in what scholars study and how they study it. These gaps limit our ability to design policies and practices that lead to sustained, equal employment outcomes for women and other marginalised groups.

Theoretical gaps

Many studies show an over-reliance on a few frameworks such as Role Congruity, Lack of Fit, Signaling, and Person–Organization Fit. While these theories are valuable for explaining individual- and organizational-level bias, their dominance narrows the view of broader structural causes. At the same time, there is limited use of intersectional and critical perspectives, such as intersectionality, postcolonial feminism, or governmentality. As a result, research often fails to capture how gender interacts with race, class, religion, or migration status in shaping recruitment outcomes. Another gap is the underuse of macro and systems theories, including population dynamics, institutional theory, and political-economy perspectives. These approaches could provide a deeper

understanding of long-term systemic drivers of inequality and the impact of policy or market changes over time. Work on algorithmic fairness in recruitment is also still at an early stage. Although studies on AI and hiring algorithms are emerging, theoretical development that links socio-technical perspectives with recruitment practices remains underdeveloped.

Contextual gaps

Much of the research originates from the United States and parts of Europe, creating a strong Western bias. Evidence from Africa, Latin America, and large parts of Asia is limited, which restricts the global applicability of findings. Studies are also concentrated in a few sectors, particularly higher education, technology/STEM, hospitality, and the public sector. Other important areas, such as the informal economy, agriculture, and small enterprises, remain understudied. Furthermore, limited attention is given to differences across organizational size and type. Few studies systematically compare recruitment practices in multinational firms, SMEs, startups, and public agencies, even though contexts differ and require tailored interventions.

Methodological gaps

Methodologically, the literature shows several recurring gaps. A shortage of longitudinal studies is clear, as most research is cross-sectional or experimental, leaving the long-term effects of policies and interventions underexplored. There is also an underuse of mixed- methods approaches that combine rich qualitative depth with strong quantitative analysis. This limits understanding of the processes and meanings behind recruitment practices. In addition, field trials and real-world interventions are less common compared to lab and vignette studies. Few randomized controlled trials, organizational interventions, or action-research projects have been conducted to test scalable solutions in practice. Sampling also presents a limitation, with many studies relying on convenience samples such as students, online panels, or English-only texts, which reduces external validity. Finally, in studies involving AI, there is often insufficient measurement and transparency. Many machine-learning evaluations lack standard fairness metrics, clear audit processes, and external validation, making it difficult to fully assess the role of algorithms in recruitment.

Pathways for sustainable employment

Addressing these gaps can create stronger pathways for sustainable employment. Expanding beyond the dominant theories to include intersectional, macro, and socio-technical perspectives can help capture the structural, cultural, and technological forces that shape recruitment. This shift would allow researchers and policymakers to design interventions that tackle not only individual bias but also systemic inequality. Broadening the geographical and sectoral focus is also crucial. More research from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and understudied industries such as agriculture, informal work, and small enterprises would produce context-sensitive insights and ensure that policies are globally relevant. Similarly, comparing practices across different organizational types, from startups to public agencies, can reveal which interventions are scalable and which must be tailored. Methodologically, pathways forward include greater use of longitudinal designs to track lasting effects of diversity

initiatives, mixed-methods approaches to connect statistical evidence with lived experiences, and field trials or action research to test solutions in real organizational settings. Improvements in sampling diversity and the adoption of transparent standards in AI-based recruitment are also necessary to build fair and trustworthy systems. Taken together, these pathways highlight that sustainable employment depends not only on removing bias in recruitment but also on embedding inclusivity, accountability, and long-term monitoring across policies, organizations, and technologies.

Implications

The findings carry important implications for managers, HR professionals, and organizations that aim to make recruitment more inclusive and supportive of gender equality. First, organizations need to move beyond surface-level diversity statements and address structural barriers by embedding inclusive policies across all stages of recruitment. This can be achieved through standardized job descriptions, structured interviews, and transparent evaluation criteria that reduce the influence of bias and stereotypes. Second, HR professionals should adopt intersectional approaches, ensuring that recruitment policies consider not only gender but also

how it interacts with race, class, religion,

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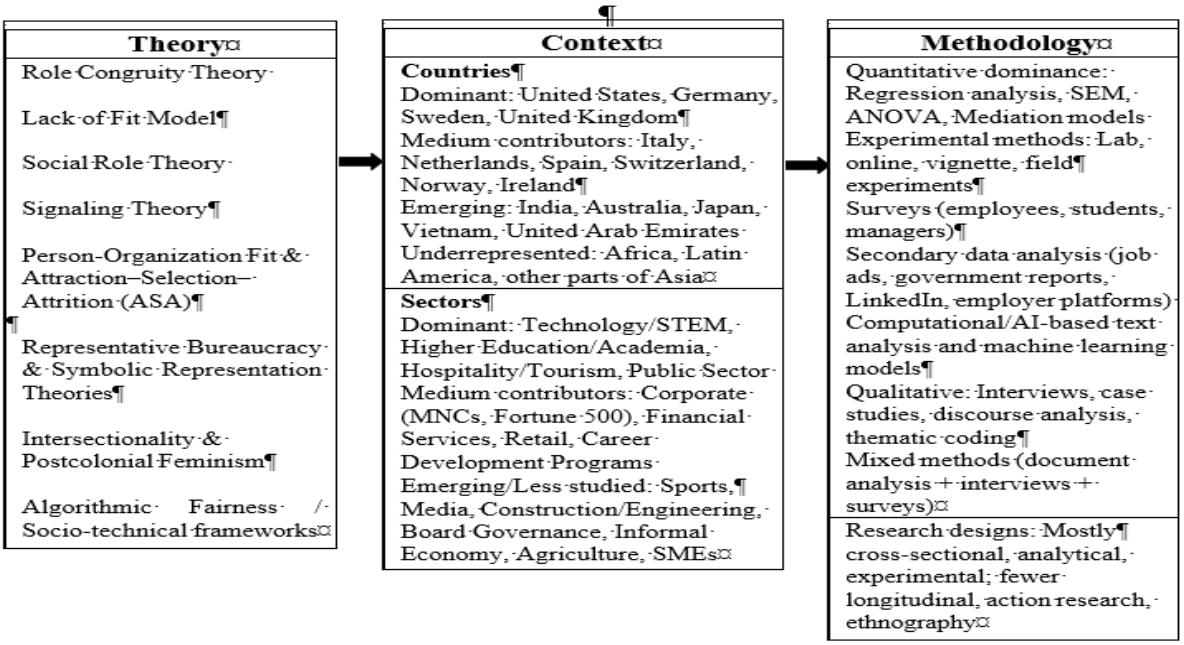
disability, and other identities. Third, managers should embrace evidence-based practices, such as joint evaluation, blind review of applications where appropriate, and the consistent use of fairness audits in AI-driven recruitment systems. These steps will help create fairer hiring outcomes and build trust in recruitment processes. Fourth, organizations can support sustainable employment by combining recruitment reforms with supportive workplace policies, such as flexible work arrangements, mentorship programs, and leadership pathways for women and underrepresented groups. Finally, organizations should invest in long-term monitoring and evaluation of recruitment initiatives. Tracking outcomes over time will help to assess whether diversity measures lead to real and lasting change in representation and career progression. By integrating these practical steps, managers and HR professionals can ensure that recruitment not only provides equal access but also contributes to sustainable and inclusive employment systems.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the analysis, this study adapts the TCM framework and presents a conceptual framework for understanding gender equality in recruitment (see Figure 2). The framework is outlined below

Figure II: TCM Conceptual Framework



CONCLUSION

This study reviewed 48 peer-reviewed papers on gender equality in recruitment and analyzed them using the TCM (Theory, Context, Methodology) framework. The findings show that a few dominant theories, such as Role Congruity, Lack of Fit, Social Role Theory, and Signaling Theory, largely shape the field, while critical perspectives like intersectionality, postcolonial feminism, and algorithmic fairness remain underexplored. In terms of context, research is concentrated in Western countries and specific sectors such as higher education, technology, hospitality, and the public sector, while regions such as Africa, Latin America, and underrepresented sectors like agriculture, SMEs, and informal economies receive limited attention. Methodologically, most studies rely on quantitative and experimental approaches, while longitudinal, mixed-method, and real-world intervention studies are relatively scarce. By consolidating these insights, the study proposes a conceptual framework that highlights both dominant trends and underexplored areas, offering pathways for future research and practice to make recruitment more inclusive and supportive of gender equality in sustainable employment.

Limitations

Although this study provides a structured review and develops a conceptual framework, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the review is based only on peer-reviewed journal articles, which may exclude valuable insights from grey literature, policy documents, and organizational case studies. Second, the reliance on English-language publications introduces the possibility of linguistic and regional bias, limiting the global scope. Third, while the TCM framework is useful for organizing and comparing studies, it may not capture every interdisciplinary perspective on gender and recruitment. Finally, since recruitment practices and technologies evolve quickly, particularly with the rise

of AI-based tools, some recent developments may not yet be fully represented in the reviewed studies.

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