

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

CAREER PROGRESSION OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THE  
TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

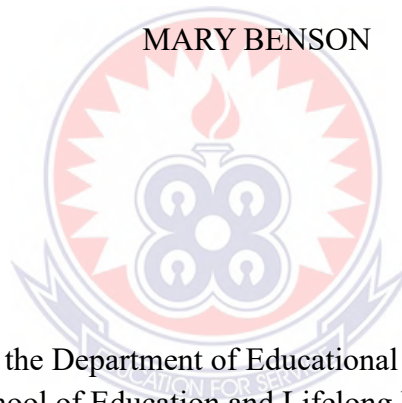


DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

CAREER PROGRESSION OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN THE  
TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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JUNE, 2025

## DECLARATION

### STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Mary Benson, declare that this thesis, '**Career Progression of Women in Leadership Positions in the Technical Universities: Challenges and Opportunities**', with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:.....

Date: .....

### SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

..... (Principal Supervisor)

Signature:..... Date: .....

.....(Co-Supervisor)

Signature:..... Date: .....

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my boys Yedidiah and Papa Kwesi



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. George Kankam, who assiduously and effortlessly supervised this work and Prof. Hinnah Kusi, my co-supervisor. Their suggestions and directions have brought the work this far. May God continue to bless them with more wisdom.

Kenneth Quansah, deserves the accolades for understanding that I need to be away from them for further studies to enable their mother progress in her career.

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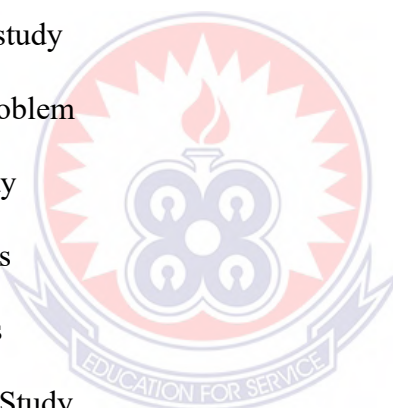
I acknowledge the efforts of my very good friend Awo Appiah Acheampong and her mother, Louisa Araba Amoquandoh, who spared me their home to lay my head whenever I attended lectures.

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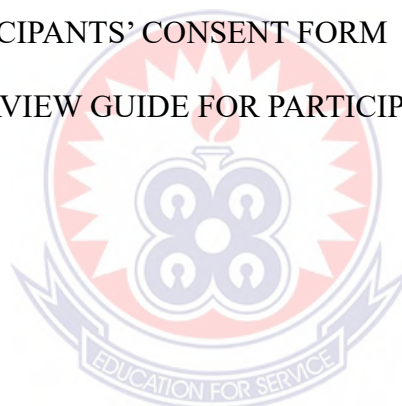


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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the career progression of women occupying leadership positions within the Technical Universities in Ghana. Grounded in the interpretivist research paradigm, the study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological design within a qualitative framework. Data were collected from twelve female leaders across selected Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana using a maximum variation sampling strategy to ensure diversity of perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were employed to elicit in-depth accounts of participants' lived experiences. The data obtained was analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that few women occupy key strategic leadership roles in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana; however, those who have achieved notable progress, adopted varied leadership styles, and actively pursued career growth, breaking traditional norms and motivating future female leaders. Also, women's career advancement in technical universities was driven by teamwork, positive attitudes, mentorship, networking, Organisational support, continuous learning, personal and religious values, as well as cultural awareness. Nonetheless, aspiring women leaders faced obstacles such as Organisational, cultural, and societal barriers, gender discrimination and resistance from peers. Despite these challenges, opportunities existed in the form of paid study leave, external partnerships, technological advancements, diversity and inclusion initiatives. The study also found that even after attaining leadership roles, women continued to experience gender bias, structural challenges, work-life balance difficulties, and cultural pressures. Based on the findings, the study concludes that meaningful progress in gender equity within technical university leadership hinges not merely on opportunity but on the institutionalization of inclusive cultures that recognize and actively dismantle structural and societal barriers. The study recommends that technical universities intensify gender-inclusive policies, mentorship programmes, and Organisational support to sustain and enhance women's leadership progression to overcome persistent structural and cultural barriers.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background to the study

All over the globe, the population of women is currently experiencing an exponential growth. The world's population is estimated to be 7.2 billion individuals, with women making up more than half of this total (Zeifman et al., 2022). The global population is projected to reach 8.5 billion by 2030, increase to 9.7 billion by 2050, and rise to approximately 11.2 billion by 2100 (United Nations, 2022). This trend of a population explosion, including that of women, signals a shift in the global workforce from male to female, which has begun and will likely continue. This shift in the workforce further amplifies the indispensability of women to the growth and development of contemporary society.

Regrettably, the significant shift toward including women in the workforce has yet to meaningfully transform the entrenched image of womanhood in many patriarchal societies, including those shaped by traditional African worldviews. Images of women as inferior, weak, subordinate, mediocre, dependent, and secondary have persisted into the 21st century, largely sustained by cultural and religious traditions (Smith & Sinkford, 2022). Oddly, as noted by Tamale (2020), some of the stereotypes and unfavourable perceptions of women are not native to Africa but are instead foreign ideas that have been imposed on African women, while others are typically domestic pseudo-gender ideas.

Evidence abounds that women have faced discrimination and bias in social, political, familial, and economic life since time immemorial (Bhandari, 2023). Women in virtually all developed societies in the world have experienced low status,

exploitation, oppression, and loss of self-determination. The struggle for rights and freedom from societal norms has been a long and enduring one. It dates as far back as ancient Rome, where women had few social and legal rights. Throughout history, ancient societies attempted to control the conduct of women based on moral grounds. For instance, adultery was made a criminal offence, but only when a married woman committed such adultery (Heiliczer, 2019). A married man was free to commit any illicit sexual act. Childbearing was encouraged, and the role of women was significantly confined by the norms of the society. Even in the religious context, the woman has been given a subordinate place relative to the man. According to the Bible, Eve's weakness is cited as the reason for Adam's fall and, ergo, the fall of humanity in sin. The institutions of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church have been accused of gender apartheid by not accepting women into the clergy and religious leadership roles. The Qur'an outlines specific rights and duties for women, emphasizing that while Muslim men are permitted to practice polygyny, women are not granted a similar option (Motiejune, 2025). Conviction by the Islamic criminal code further discriminates against women, as it relies heavily on witness testimony. Female testimonies alone are considered insufficient to convict a murderer, requiring a male testimony for validation.

Over the past decades, women have attained soaring levels of education in many parts of the world, and their proportion comprises around forty percent of workers worldwide (Liepmann, 2020). In many countries, women have higher rates of enrolment in schools and universities and dominate certain economic sectors such as the nursing fields. Research further shows that women comprise over half of the students enrolled in many University degree programmes and occupy more than half

of the professional entry-level positions, and their representation dwindles to around 15% at the executive level (Barclay et al., 2022; Beghini et al., 2022).

Globally, women play vital roles in Organisations, and increasing their representation in leadership yields significant benefits. Notably, female leaders enhance institutional appeal for junior women, thereby expanding the talent pool across all levels (Cardel et al., 2020; Samuelson et al., 2025; Elkhwesky et al., 2025).

Furthermore, women in senior executive roles have been linked to improved business outcomes, including greater customer numbers, higher sales revenue, increased profitability, and stronger stock performance (Gomez & Bernet, 2019). Similarly, Mayer & Oosthuizen (2020) suggested that women are known to be creative and are very strong in generating ideas and innovation. They are seen to have a higher moral and ethical standard and these factors are very important for any transformational leader. Mintzberg (2019) and Williams (2023), however, note that although the importance of women in top management cannot be overemphasized, given the key role they play at the top level, the numbers occupying these positions do not reflect this.

However, it can therefore be said that the career path of women in professional services has never been straightforward, and getting into a position of leadership has always been a struggle for women. Research further indicates that although there is an increased presence of female employees in mid-management positions, executive positions across the globe continue to be dominated by men (Mason, 2019). This phenomenon, however, has not been paralleled by equal access to work opportunities at higher levels of Organisations. There is a persistent world trend affecting female managers where their career development plateau is at middle management positions.

Throughout history, women have occasionally debuted in leadership positions, from the Queens of England to the Pharaohs of Egypt, yet females are still historically underrepresented (Sweat, 2020).

Historically, women have faced barriers, sometimes imposed by other women, when seeking to occupy roles traditionally dominated by men (Croft et al., 2015). Also, Cultural norms and legal restrictions have historically excluded women from leadership roles, a pattern evident across all major religions and, in some cases, still present today (Radke et al., 2016). These exclusions reflect deeply ingrained gender biases, rooted in outdated stereotypes about the roles traditionally assigned to men and women (Kirai, 2014). The impact of implicit bias has significantly affected corporate growth, the direction of innovation, long-term sustainability, and the financial stability of women (Belle, 2017).

Surfeit evidence in literature suggests that women accumulating management experience and completion of professional education programmes do not seem sufficient to ensure their access to senior management positions at a comparable rate to men (Epstein, 2022; Williams, 2023). Although women have made some gains in entering and rising in managerial ranks in Organisations worldwide, men continue to dominate executive and senior management positions (Belle, 2017). From a global perspective, a study by Yousaf and Schmiede (2017) revealed that, in four out of ten businesses in the world, there are no women in senior positions. Also, in the UK and the USA, there has been an increase in the number of women in management at junior and middle management levels (Tarkovska et al., 2023). However, career advancement remains slow and uneven for women despite government legislation, legal sanction, greater participation in education and increasing entry into the

workforce in general and into management occupations in particular. In Germany, only a very small proportion of women advance to senior management positions (Straub, 2017).

In Africa, Botha (2017) pinpointed that despite a slow increase of women in senior positions, they still lag behind their male counterparts in terms of representation in management and Chief Executive Office positions. Also, in Nigeria, Okeke (2017) noted that despite their increasing representation, women experience difficulties in developing their careers in male-dominated occupations. These difficulties are pointers to the complex realities of women working in male oriented environment. Although women are making significant strides to develop careers in the previously male-dominated professions, they are still grossly underrepresented in senior management and public decision-making positions in both private and public organisations in Africa. Working class women have special challenges by virtue of their gender and roles in society as mothers, wives, and many times daughters of ailing parents (Curenton et al., 2018).

Consequently, the inception of its global agenda on gender equality, the United Nations (UN) has been instrumental in elevating the recognition and advancement of women in society and career development (Sen, G. (2019). The Organisation's commitment began with the 1975 Mexico City Conference during the International Women's Year, where 133 member states and thousands of NGOs convened to establish the World Plan of Action; a policy initiative that guided interventions through 1985 to enhance women's roles in governance, employment, and education (Bonfiglioli, 2021). Building on this foundation, the Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) Conferences expanded focus to legal protections, health equity, and women's

property rights, catalyzing legislative reforms and institutional mechanisms in numerous nations (Yadollahi, Zarei & Yavari, 2020). The UN's emphasis on multilateral participation ensured both state and non-state actors were central in promoting women's rights, helping to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in national development agendas. These conferences established a trajectory of accountability, influencing gender-responsive budgeting, inclusive education, and labour market policies, and reinforcing women's visibility in socio-economic systems.

Similarly, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing represented a paradigmatic shift in global gender governance. With participation from 189 countries and thousands of civil society actors, the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action operationalized gender equality into 12 critical areas, including education, economic empowerment, political participation, and environmental sustainability (Arat, 2015). As a normative framework, the Platform for Action redefined women's societal roles from passive beneficiaries to active stakeholders in policy and development (Fauzi & Setiawan, 2025). Subsequent United Nations reviews of the Beijing Platform for Action have played a critical role in institutionalizing accountability mechanisms and reinforcing state obligations to gender equality within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These periodic assessments have been instrumental in embedding gender-responsive approaches into national policy planning and evaluation processes, advancing affirmative action strategies to strengthen women's representation in leadership, and cultivating institutional cultures that support women's participation and career advancement across sectors (UN Women, 2021). Despite the series of affirmative and women conferences, underrepresentation, lack of equal opportunity for career advancement, and stereotypes about women in leadership continue to keep women out

of top-ranking positions globally, with no exception in Ghana (Yusuf & Yahaya, 2022; Childress-Kannan, 2024).

Ghana is a developing country and the first African South Saharan country to gain its independence in 1957 (Owusu-Ansah, 2023). It has a population of 30.42 million, of which 57.5 percent of women, compared to 46.3 percent of men, do not have formal education and, thus, are unable to read and write (Odonkor & Mahami, 2020). Ghana is also one of the first African country to adopt the international convention on women's rights and the elimination of all forms of gender discrimination (Dowuona-Hammond, et al., 2020). The country has also undertaken multifaceted initiatives to enhance women's participation in education and the workforce. Government-led programmes, such as the Girl Child Education Unit and the "Africa Educates Her" campaign, have focused on increasing girls' enrollment and retention, particularly in underserved regions (Abraham et al., 2017). Collaborations with Organisations like CAMFED have provided scholarships and mentorship, supporting marginalized girls through secondary education and tertiary education and into employment or further training (Baxter et al., 2022). Additionally, UNICEF's "Undaunted Women Support Project" has addressed barriers such as poverty and early marriage, thereby improving school attendance and completion rates (Unicef, 2022; Rumble et al., 2024). Oxfam's Girls Model Junior High Schools provide supportive environments for girls from impoverished backgrounds, enhancing their confidence and academic performance.

In the realm of employment, the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act, passed in 2024, mandates a minimum of 30% female representation in governance and decision-making roles by 2026, increasing to 50% by 2030. Non-governmental Organisations have also played a significant role; for instance, the Soronko Academy

has trained over 20,000 women and girls in digital skills, while Guzakuza has empowered women in agribusiness across Africa, of which Ghana is not an exception. Notwithstanding, Women remain underrepresented in leadership positions, and systemic barriers such as socio-cultural norms and limited access to resources continue to impede their career progression (Darko & Seibu, 2016; Mate et al., 2019). Similarly, Adongo et al. (2023), opined that most Ghanaian women are considered to be subordinate to men instead of leaders

Although men and women are considered equal under Ghanaian law, women still face discrimination in Ghana (Dowuona-Hammond et al., 2020). Also, Keohane (2020) posited that women play a subordinate role to their male counterparts in leadership and within their homes, a view reflected in traditional Ghanaian society, which has historically considered women's education secondary to their roles as mothers and wives (Jiajia & Samba, 2019). This entrenched subjugation has extended into higher education in Ghana, where women often encounter structural barriers, gender bias, and limited access to leadership opportunities, hindering their full participation and advancement within academic institutions. Boakye-Djan (2020) opined that, in higher educational institutions in Ghana, men tend to shy away from giving women leadership responsibilities, especially those that involve autonomous decision-making. Research indicates that women in academic leadership have made only limited progress in advancing their careers, as they continue to lag behind their male counterparts in attaining higher-ranking positions and recognition within the academic hierarchy (Kezar & Posselt, 2020).

The underrepresentation of women in leadership is not only a national concern but also deeply evident within Ghana's technical universities, where gender disparities in

top management roles persist despite efforts toward inclusivity. Amponsaa-Asenso (2018) observed that, even though women make up a significant portion of Ghana's population, there remains a stark absence of qualified women occupying strategic leadership positions, particularly in male-dominated higher academic institutions such as technical universities. This gap is not necessarily due to a lack of capability or educational attainment but rather the enduring impact of the glass ceiling, which continues to act as an invisible yet powerful barrier restricting women's advancement (Khan et al., 2025). Technical universities, traditionally structured along patriarchal lines, often reflect the broader societal patterns where institutional cultures, gendered expectations, and limited mentorship opportunities collectively hinder women's progression into leadership. It is against this background that the need for the current study arises.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Women represent nearly half of the global population and have made substantial advances in both education and workforce participation. Nonetheless, their presence in leadership roles remains disproportionately low across various sectors worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2023; Marano et al., 2022). Despite international frameworks such as the Beijing Platform for Action and Sustainable Development Goal 5 that advocate for gender equality, women's advancement into senior leadership is hindered by persistent structural, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers (UN Women, 2021; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Research consistently shows that, while women are increasingly found in professional and middle management positions, their transition to executive leadership is slow and marked by significant disparities (Metz & Simon, 2019; Nachum et al., 2022). These challenges are closely connected to enduring gender stereotypes, patriarchal Organisational cultures, and systemic

inequalities that continue to restrict women's career advancement (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Taparia & Lenka, 2022).

These obstacles are especially pronounced within the African context, where women remain notably underrepresented in leadership positions despite improvements in educational attainment and workforce integration (Stotsky et al., 2016). Cultural expectations and gendered power dynamics, alongside limited access to professional networks and mentorship, continue to hinder women's movement into senior management (Botha, 2017; Okeke, 2017). Such issues are underpinned by deeply rooted institutional and socio-cultural norms that reinforce male dominance within Organisational hierarchies (Curenton et al., 2018).

In Ghana, gender disparities in leadership persist across both public and private sectors. Although the government has implemented several policy measures, such as the National Gender Policy and the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act, women continue to be underrepresented in key decision-making roles (Dowuona-Hammond et al., 2020; Adongo et al., 2023). Traditional cultural norms assigning domestic roles to women further constrain their mobility and leadership opportunities (Adu-Oppong & Arthur, 2015; Gyekye, 2013). As a result, recruitment and promotion processes remain influenced by gender stereotypes and institutional biases, thereby limiting women's access to senior positions (Darko & Seibu, 2016).

The higher education sector in Ghana reflects these broader gender disparities. Despite increasing numbers of women entering academia, their representation in senior administrative and executive positions remains limited (Kezar & Posselt, 2020). This situation exemplifies the "glass ceiling," which denotes invisible institutional obstacles that hinder qualified women from ascending to top leadership,

regardless of their qualifications (Cotter et al., 2001). In Ghanaian universities, male-dominated institutional cultures and gendered expectations continue to impede women's advancement into influential positions (Boakye-Djan, 2020).

The underrepresentation of women is even more acute in Ghana's Technical Universities. These institutions are pivotal for national development, given their role in producing skilled graduates and fostering economic growth (Addai, 2024; Bentum-Micah et al., 2024). Nevertheless, women occupy very few strategic leadership roles within technical universities, primarily due to male-dominated cultures, scarce mentorship opportunities, and the gendered history of technical disciplines (Amponsaa-Asenso, 2018; Dankwa, 2018). Despite the growing scholarly focus on women in leadership, there remains a notable empirical gap regarding the unique experiences of women in technical university leadership, as most research has concentrated on corporate or traditional university settings (Rincon et al., 2017; Morley et al., 2017; Ansah, 2012; Paryono, 2017).

Addressing the persistent gender gap in leadership within Ghana's technical universities is not only a matter of social justice but also crucial for institutional effectiveness and national development. Higher education institutions contribute significantly to knowledge production, innovation, and human capital development (Hazelkorn, 2023). The exclusion of women from leadership restricts the diversity of perspectives necessary for effective governance and Organisational performance (Gomez & Bernet, 2019; Mayer & Oosthuizen, 2020). Thus, it is imperative to critically examine and address the barriers, opportunities, and institutional dynamics shaping women's leadership trajectories within Ghana's technical universities to promote inclusive growth and enhance national development.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The overarching aim of the study was to explore barriers to career progression of women in leadership positions in the Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.

### **1.4. Research Objectives**

The study specifically sought to:

1. explore the career progression of women in leadership in the Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana,
2. investigate the factors that contribute to the career progression of women in leadership in the Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana,
3. explore the challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions in the Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana,
4. identify the opportunities available to women aspiring for leadership positions in the Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana,
5. establish the barriers that women who have attained leadership positions in the Technical Universities face in their leadership roles and
6. identify the strategies initiated by Technical Universities in dealing with challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the career progressions of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana?
2. What factors contribute to the career progression of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana?

3. What challenges do women in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana face when aspiring for leadership positions?
4. What are the opportunities available for women in aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana?
5. What barriers do women who have attained leadership positions in Technical Universities report that hinder them in their leadership roles in Ghana?
6. What are the strategies set up by Technical Universities in dealing with challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions?

## **1.6. Significance of the Study**

### **1.6.1. Policy Significance**

This study holds substantial significance for policy formulation, especially within Ghana's higher education and public service sectors. The findings will offer evidence-based insights that can inform the development of institutional and national policies aimed at addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within Technical Universities. By highlighting the structural and cultural barriers to women's career progression, this research will support the creation of gender-sensitive policies that promote equal access to leadership opportunities. For instance, the study may uncover gaps in promotion criteria, mentoring programmes, or recruitment processes that disadvantage women. These insights will enable policy-makers, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), and university governing councils, to design interventions that encourage inclusive leadership pipelines and equity-focused human resource policies. Additionally, the study can guide advocacy groups and non-governmental Organisations in lobbying for gender-transformative policies across the tertiary education landscape. Ultimately,

this study aims to influence national discourse and strategic planning for advancing women's leadership in academia and beyond.

### **1.6.2. Practical Significance**

This study provides significant contributions to the professional and operational dimensions of leadership development within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. By examining the lived experiences of women in academic leadership, the study will provide actionable recommendations for institutional leaders, HR practitioners, and administrative managers to better attract, develop, and retain women leaders. The research will shed light on real-world strategies used by successful Ghanaian women to navigate barriers such as work-life balance, societal expectations, and gendered performance evaluations. These findings will empower practitioners to implement tailored support systems, such as mentorship programmes, flexible work arrangements, and gender-responsive leadership training. Moreover, the study's outcomes will inform performance appraisal systems and promotion pathways to ensure they are inclusive and merit-based. For women aspiring to leadership, the study will serve as a source of motivation and guidance, equipping them with knowledge of strategies that have worked for others. Thus, the practical significance lies in fostering a more equitable and supportive environment for women in leadership.

### **1.6.3. Theoretical Significance**

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its potential to refine and contextualize existing leadership and gender theories within a sub-Saharan African academic setting. Dominant frameworks such as the Glass Ceiling Theory (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986), Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and the Perceived Lack-of-Fit Model (Heilman, 1983) have predominantly been developed

and tested in corporate and Western academic contexts. These models, while insightful, often overlook the socio-cultural and institutional specificities that shape leadership trajectories in Ghanaian Technical Universities. By grounding the analysis in the experiences of women in these institutions, this research will critically assess the extent to which these theories apply or require adaptation. The study may lead to a conceptual refinement or the development of a hybrid model that better reflects the realities of female leaders in non-Western academic environments. This theoretical advancement is crucial for generating frameworks that are both empirically grounded and culturally relevant, thereby enriching the global discourse on gender and leadership.

#### **1.6.4. Methodological Significance**

Methodologically, this study is significant in its effort to clarify and exemplify the most effective qualitative approaches for investigating women's leadership experiences in Ghanaian academia. While existing studies have broadly employed qualitative methods to explore gender and leadership, many fall short in identifying and justifying the specific design, be it phenomenology, grounded theory, or case study, best suited to capture the nuanced and contextual realities of female leaders in Technical Universities. This research will explicitly adopt and justify a particular qualitative methodology that aligns with its research objectives, thereby setting a precedent for methodological transparency and rigor. In doing so, the study will contribute to the growing body of qualitative research in gender studies by demonstrating how carefully chosen methods can yield rich, in-depth insights. Additionally, it will provide future researchers with a replicable framework for studying similar phenomena in comparable contexts. Thus, the methodological

contribution extends beyond content to serve as a guide for future academic inquiries in African gender and leadership research.

### **1.7. Delimitations of the Study**

This study was delimited to exploring the barriers to career progression of women in leadership within the context of Technical Universities in Southern Ghana. The study specifically examined the career progression trends of women, the enabling and constraining factors influencing their advancement, the challenges encountered when aspiring to leadership positions, the opportunities available, and the barriers faced by women who had already attained such roles. The context of Southern Ghana was considered critical, as institutional cultures, regional development disparities, and policy implementations may vary significantly across the country. By narrowing the geographical scope, the study focused on technical universities within a common socio-cultural and administrative environment, allowing for a more contextually grounded understanding of the phenomenon. Only women who had attained top-tier strategic leadership positions, such as Vice-Chancellors, Pro Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, and Deans, were included in the study, ensuring insights were drawn from those with lived experiences in upper-level decision-making roles. The study did not include technical universities located in the middle and northern zones of Ghana, nor did it consider perspectives from men or women in non-leadership academic or administrative positions. This delimitation enabled a focused, in-depth exploration of the barriers within a specific institutional and regional context.

The study was also delimited to the southern part of Ghana, so that the data were collected from women who had attained higher positions in the Technical Universities at Sunyani, Takoradi, Kumasi, Ho, Accra, and Cape Coast. My interest was to obtain in-depth knowledge of the subject matter, but not necessarily to cover a wider area in

Ghana. Also, it was limited to those currently in one of the higher positions mentioned above.

### **1.8. Operational Definitions of Key Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the operational definitions have been used.

**Career progression:** This refers to the upward or downward movement of employees within an Organisation

**Career Advancement:** Moving to higher job responsibilities or reaching a top position in companies or Organisations to anticipated future posts

**Equal opportunity:** The principle of treating all people the same without being discriminated against based on gender, age, or national origin.

**Gender:** A set of characteristics that are associated with a specific biological sex (male or female) that is also referred to as masculine or feminine, but is associated with females or discrimination.

**Gender stereotype:** The differences of treatment that exist because of stereotypical expectations, behaviours, and attitudes toward women.

**Leadership:** The ability to influence, inspire, persuade, and motivate others to pursue a shared vision to achieve worthwhile goals.

### **1.9. Motivation of the Study**

The impetus behind embarking on this study is firmly anchored in the researcher's profound acknowledgment of the extraordinary achievements and untapped potential of women who occupy leadership roles within the realm of Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. The choice to focus on Technical Universities in this study is underpinned by a profound recognition of their pivotal role within the educational landscape of Ghana. These institutions serve as veritable crucibles of knowledge, innovation, and human resource development, positioning themselves as

significant contributors to the nation's socio-economic growth and development. The importance of Technical Universities cannot be overstated, as they are instrumental in producing highly skilled graduates who are not only equipped with the latest technical knowledge but also possess the problem-solving abilities and innovative thinking necessary to drive progress in various industries. Despite the undeniable significance of Technical Universities in shaping the nation's future, there exists a pressing need to investigate the experiences of women within these institutions, particularly those who have ascended to key leadership positions. It is incumbent upon the researcher to explore how these remarkable women have charted their career trajectories and to comprehend the formidable obstacles that may have impeded their professional progress. Through this exploration, the researcher aims to shine a spotlight on their journeys, struggles, and triumphs, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics at play within Ghana's educational sector.

Another compelling motivation for this study resides in the broader context of gender equality. In a world striving for parity in all spheres of life, the enduring gender disparities in leadership roles across various sectors remain a cause for concern. Technical Universities, as centres of higher education and innovation, should serve as exemplars of inclusivity and diversity. By undertaking an in-depth examination of the experiences of women who have risen to leadership positions within these institutions, the researcher hopes to contribute to a larger discourse on gender equality and provide practical insights into promoting women's advancement in academia. Furthermore, the choice of a qualitative research approach, specifically phenomenology, is a deliberate and strategic decision that aligns perfectly with the study's objectives. Phenomenology, with its emphasis on exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals, is the ideal lens through which to examine the intricate and nuanced

narratives of women in leadership positions within Technical Universities. Through in-depth interviews and immersive analysis, the researcher will capture the essence of their experiences, gaining insight into the unique challenges they have faced, as well as the strategies and pathways they have forged to achieve success. This qualitative approach empowers to go beyond the statistical surface and uncover the rich tapestry of experiences that can inspire change and drive actionable recommendations. Overall, the motive for this study is not merely an academic exercise but a quest for enlightenment and women's empowerment. Ultimately, this study aspires to be a catalyst for positive change, fostering an environment where women can not only thrive but also play a pivotal role in the growth and development of Ghana's Technical Universities and, by extension, the entire nation.

#### **1.10. Organisation of the Study**

The research was divided into five chapters. Chapter One provided the introduction, presenting the background to the study, problem statement, purpose and objectives of the study, research questions, significance, delimitations, definitions of key terms as well as motivation of the study. Chapter Two offered the literature review, encompassing the theoretical review, conceptual review, conceptual framework, and empirical review. Chapter Three detailed the research methodology. Chapter Four presented the data analysis, results, and interpretation. Finally, Chapter Five summarized the major findings, drew conclusions, offered recommendations, and suggested areas for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

The research concentrated on the obstacles hindering women's advancement in their careers. In this chapter, various scholars' perspectives and findings relevant to the study were reviewed and presented. Sections of this chapter include: theoretical review, conceptual review, empirical review, and conceptual framework.

#### 2.2. Theoretical Review

The theoretical review underpinning this study draws primarily on the Glass Ceiling Theory, Role Congruity Theory, and Gender Role Theory. Among these, the Glass Ceiling Theory serves as the central framework because it most effectively captures the systemic and institutional barriers that prevent qualified women from advancing to leadership positions, particularly within Ghana's Technical Universities. This theory critically illuminates how invisible, yet deeply embedded, Organisational and societal factors collectively hinder women's upward mobility despite their qualifications and experience. Complementing this, Role Congruity Theory explains how gender stereotypes and the perceived incongruity between female gender roles and leadership expectations generate prejudice and bias against women leaders, thus reinforcing barriers to career progression. Gender Role Theory further enriches the analysis by highlighting the social construction of gender norms and expectations through socialization processes, which shape behaviours, roles, and identities that influence women's career trajectories. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens to examine the interplay of structural, cultural, and cognitive factors affecting women's leadership advancement, with the Glass Ceiling Theory driving the study due to its

robust focus on systemic inequality and institutional dynamics in Organisational contexts.

### **2.2.1 Glass Ceiling Theory**

The "glass ceiling" theory, popularized in the late 1970s by feminist scholars such as Marilyn Loden (Cotter et al., 2001), has emerged as a pivotal framework for analyzing gender disparities in professional settings. It metaphorically describes the invisible yet impenetrable barriers that obstruct qualified women from attaining top leadership roles (Cotter et al., 2001). Scholars like Taparia and Lenka (2022) and Zeng (2011) have argued that these barriers reflect institutional discrimination, often embedded within Organisational norms. Similarly, Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) and Bendl and Schmidt (2010) characterize the glass ceiling as a persistent and systemic obstacle, reinforced by biased hiring, promotion practices, and exclusion from key networks. Likewise, the theory assumes that gender-based discrimination operates through subtle mechanisms, such as biased evaluations, restricted mentorship access, and rigid hierarchical structures, that disproportionately disadvantage women (Pisker et al., 2021). Furthermore, it acknowledges intersectionality, noting that women of marginalized backgrounds face compounded disadvantages (Li & Leung, 2001). The theory has thus shaped discussions on workplace equity, highlighting the role of Organisational culture, inadequate gender policies, and unsupportive work-life practices in perpetuating inequality.

Contributing factors to the glass ceiling include individual-level constraints, such as risk aversion, confidence levels, and limited networking, as well as deeply rooted institutional and societal structures (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Taparia & Lenka, 2022). Organisationally, masculine leadership norms, biased succession planning, and restricted access to senior roles have consistently reinforced gendered exclusion

(Taparia & Lenka, 2022). On the societal front, stereotypes, unconscious bias, and traditional gender roles also significantly affect women's leadership trajectories (Li & Leung, 2001; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Bendl & Schmidt, 2010). Empirical applications further validate these claims. For instance, Hoobler (2009) found that women received fewer developmental opportunities, while Mattis (2007) revealed that many women exited corporate environments due to systemic inflexibilities. Likewise, Myres (2016) and Afza & Newaz (2008) identified organisational culture, internal structures, and socio-familial expectations as crucial determinants. In Sri Lanka, Chamaru (2013) underscored the role of family practices, whereas Linda et al. (2008) and Van and Fischer (2002) observed psychological resignation among women facing prolonged discrimination. On the contrary, critics have noted key limitations. Ezzedeen et al. (2015) argued that the theory insufficiently addresses race, class, and sexual orientation, while Lathabhavan and Balasubramanian (2017) critiqued its narrow emphasis on formal leadership, overlooking broader inequities like unequal pay and work-life imbalance. Moreover, the theory often sidelines women's agency and underestimates the influence of societal and cultural conditioning.

Despite the aforementioned criticisms, the glass ceiling theory remains the most appropriate and robust theoretical framework for the present study, which sought to explore how women in Ghana's Technical Universities have navigated their career paths, achieved professional success, and confronted barriers to advancement. Its conceptual strength lies in its ability to expose the subtle and systemic mechanisms that impede women's upward mobility despite possessing the requisite qualifications and experience. The ceiling theory captures the complexity of institutional, Organisational, and societal factors that jointly operate to constrain women's leadership trajectories.

Moreover, this theory offers a critical lens to interrogate both overt and covert Organisational practices that reinforce patriarchal norms within academic environments. It is particularly suited to the Ghanaian context, where sociocultural expectations intersect with institutional dynamics to create unique challenges for women aspiring to leadership roles in technical fields. The theory's intersectional perspective further supports the examination of how societal factors such as family roles exacerbate gender-based inequities. While it may not exhaustively address every dimension of inequality, the glass ceiling theory offers a comprehensive scaffold to analyse both success trajectories and systemic barriers. Its established credibility in gender and leadership studies, coupled with its adaptability to varying cultural contexts, makes it a theoretically sound and empirically rich foundation for understanding the lived experiences of women navigating academic leadership within Ghana's Technical Universities.

### **2.2.2 Role Congruity Theory**

Role Congruity Theory, developed by Eagly and Karau (2002), builds upon foundational research in gender stereotypes and leadership perceptions. Earlier studies such as Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) established the association of communal traits with women and agentic traits with men, while Eagly and Karau (1991) identified the "think manager, think male" stereotype, reinforcing the alignment of leadership with masculine attributes. Unlike Social Role Theory (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), which emphasizes societal role expectations, Role Congruity Theory highlights how the incongruity between gender stereotypes and leadership expectations results in prejudice against women. Central assumptions of the theory include Gender Stereotypes, Role Incongruity, Socialization and Cultural Influence, Prejudice and Bias, and Double Standards (Eagly & Karau, 2002). For instance,

cultural norms transmitted through family, media, and religion often reinforce traditional gender roles, thereby influencing how leadership abilities are perceived across different contexts. In traditional societies, such cultural conditioning may intensify negative biases against female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Similarly, the theory underscores that women often experience prejudice and implicit bias when occupying leadership roles, facing social penalties or backlash for defying prescribed gender norms. Moreover, women are subject to double standards: behaviours such as assertiveness or dominance are rewarded in men but scrutinized in women, whose actions are frequently evaluated against more stringent and gendered expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

On the contrary, while Role Congruity Theory offers a compelling lens to understand gender-based discrimination, it has critical limitations that merit attention. First, it tends to generalize experiences, overlooking individual differences and the diversity of gender expression. Furthermore, the theory inadequately addresses intersectionality, how overlapping social identities like race, class, or sexuality compound bias (Koburtay et al., 2019). Likewise, the theory predominantly centers on women's experiences in male-dominated roles, neglecting the marginalization of men who violate traditional masculine norms (Ritter & Yoder, 2004). It also prioritizes individual-level prejudice while underemphasizing structural and institutional barriers that perpetuate inequality. Moreover, Role Congruity Theory presumes stable gender norms and may not sufficiently capture the dynamic evolution of societal attitudes towards gender (Anglin et al., 2022). Similarly, Zheng et al. (2025) postulated that the role congruity theory's emphasis on leadership roles limits its applicability to broader career progression issues. They further argued that, while Role Congruity Theory remains a seminal contribution to understanding gender bias, it must be

complemented with intersectional and structural frameworks to present a more holistic analysis of gender disparities in the workplace. Integrating these perspectives allows for a nuanced understanding of how deeply embedded societal expectations interact with evolving gender dynamics and institutional forces.

Despite its noted limitations, Role Congruity Theory remains the most appropriate theoretical framework for examining the career progression of women in leadership within Ghana's Technical Universities. Its analytical strength lies in its nuanced exposition of how gendered expectations intersect with leadership evaluations, making it particularly suited for interrogating systemic biases embedded in male-dominated academic institutions. The theory's central premise, that leadership roles are culturally aligned with masculine traits, resonates profoundly in the Ghanaian context, where patriarchal norms and socio-cultural prescriptions persistently shape institutional attitudes towards female leadership.

Crucially, Role Congruity Theory provides a robust lens through which to examine the multidimensional factors influencing career progression, including socialization, implicit bias, and evaluative double standards. These are particularly relevant in Technical Universities, where traditionally male-oriented disciplines and hierarchies exacerbate the underrepresentation of women in senior roles. Furthermore, the theory illuminates how women perceived incongruity with leadership roles hinders their upward mobility, despite possessing requisite qualifications and competencies. This analytical utility enables a comprehensive investigation into both structural and cognitive barriers that female leaders encounter post-ascension, such as role conflict, institutional marginalization, and intensified performance scrutiny. Moreover, the theory's emphasis on prejudice and bias—both overt and covert—aligns well with the

socio-cultural dynamics of Ghana's tertiary education sector, where leadership legitimacy is often contested along gendered lines. Therefore, Role Congruity Theory offers an empirically grounded and theoretically sound framework for exploring not only the pathways to leadership for women but also the enduring challenges they face once in those positions.

### **2.2.3. Gender Role Theory**

Gender role theory, a sociological and psychological framework, explores how societal expectations shape individuals' behaviours, roles, and identities based on their gender. It has evolved through interdisciplinary efforts and aims to understand the social construction of gender roles. While not attributed to a single individual, notable figures have significantly contributed to its development. Bem (1983) developed gender schema theory, emphasizing cognitive processes in acquiring and maintaining gender roles. Butler (2011) challenged traditional notions of gender, emphasizing the performative nature of gender roles. Chodorow (1995) explored early childhood experiences' impact on gender roles and identity formation, highlighting family and societal influences. Mead (1934) contributed to understanding the social nature of gender roles through symbolic interactionism. Acker (2012) focused on gender and Organisational dynamics, highlighting how structures perpetuate gender inequalities within workplaces.

Gender role theory is grounded in the understanding that gender is socially constructed and shaped through cultural and social processes, primarily through socialization within families, schools, peer groups, and media (Flynn, 2011). It posits that societal norms and expectations dictate appropriate behaviours and roles based on perceived gender, which are reinforced over time through mechanisms of reward and punishment, leading to the internalization of gender roles (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

These roles, however, are not static; they evolve across different historical periods, social contexts, and cultural backgrounds, highlighting the dynamic nature of gender (Baligar, 2018). Furthermore, the theory incorporates intersectionality, acknowledging that gender intersects with other social identities such as race, class, sexuality, and ability, thereby shaping individuals' lived experiences in complex and varied ways (Wharton, 2011). This multidimensional perspective is crucial in understanding systemic inequalities and advocating for inclusive gender analysis. Gender role theory also provides a useful framework for analyzing women's career progression by uncovering how gendered expectations, workplace biases, and Organisational cultures influence career opportunities and trajectories, while also recognizing individual agency and the potential to resist and redefine traditional gender norms (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Flynn, 2011).

Critics of gender role theory argue that it often underplays structural and institutional dimensions that shape gender inequalities, focusing disproportionately on socialization processes (Chafetz & Chafetz, 2006). These critiques emphasize that while gender role theory illuminates how societal norms and expectations influence behaviour, it inadequately addresses the embedded Organisational and systemic barriers women face in career progression. For instance, Ilinykh et al. (2016) contend that gender culture, when instrumentalized, is constrained by its functional limitations and the rigidity of prevailing social frameworks, which the theory does not sufficiently interrogate. Moreover, the theory lacks nuance in accounting for the intersectionality of multiple identities—such as race, class, and age—which compound gendered experiences in the workplace. Additionally, masculinity norms and their influence on women's career trajectories remain underexplored within this framework. Although Eagly, Woo, and Diekman (2012) have refined gender role

theory into the broader social role theory to reflect evolving gender dynamics, they still acknowledge the persistent challenge of integrating institutional and cultural contexts that affect both women's and men's occupational outcomes. Thus, while gender role theory provides a foundational understanding of the social construction of gender, it must be critically supplemented with perspectives that consider structural power relations and Organisational cultures to more fully explain career inequalities.

Despite its limitations, gender role theory remains highly relevant to the current study, as it provides a robust analytical lens through which the career trajectories of women in leadership roles within Technical Universities in Southern Ghana can be examined. The theory's central premise—that societal expectations and culturally constructed norms dictate gender-appropriate behaviours—helps to explain how deeply embedded gender stereotypes continue to influence hiring practices, promotion decisions, and leadership perceptions within academic institutions. Women aspiring to or occupying leadership positions may confront implicit biases rooted in traditional gender norms that perceive leadership as inherently masculine, thereby constraining their career progression (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Flynn, 2011). In the Ghanaian context, where cultural and institutional patriarchy persists, such norms may be further entrenched through workplace dynamics, peer interactions, and role expectations. Gender role theory is also instrumental in interrogating how early socialization, family expectations, and internalized beliefs shape women's leadership aspirations, which directly aligns with the study's focus on identifying both barriers and enabling factors to women's career advancement. Moreover, the theory's evolving emphasis on intersectionality and Organisational culture (Wharton, 2011; Acker, 2012) provides a basis for critically engaging with how institutional structures within Technical Universities either reproduce or challenge gendered inequities. Thus, applying gender

role theory enhances the study's capacity to unveil how gendered norms are negotiated, resisted, or reinforced within higher education leadership, offering grounded explanations for observed disparities and informing targeted institutional strategies.

#### **2.2.4. Point of Theoretical Convergence and Divergence**

A critical convergence of the Glass Ceiling Theory, Role Congruity Theory, and Gender Role Theory emerges at the intersection where systemic, cognitive, and socio-cultural forces collectively constrain the career progression of women in leadership within Ghana's Technical Universities. All three theories underscore the pervasive impact of entrenched gender norms and institutionalized biases, whether through invisible Organisational barriers (Glass Ceiling), perceived role incongruence (Role Congruity), or internalized societal expectations (Gender Role). This convergence is pivotal in explaining the study's findings on how women encounter compounded barriers throughout their leadership trajectories, despite possessing equivalent qualifications and competencies. For instance, while the Glass Ceiling Theory elucidates structural impediments like limited access to executive networks, Role Congruity Theory highlights prejudicial perceptions that frame women as less 'fit' for leadership, and Gender Role Theory situates these biases within broader patterns of gendered socialization. Collectively, these theories form a synergistic analytical scaffold that unravels how interlocking mechanisms of exclusion, both overt and covert, persist in technical and hierarchical academic environments.

Conversely, theoretical divergence occurs in how each framework attributes the locus and nature of inequality. The Glass Ceiling Theory predominantly focuses on macro-structural constraints, such as institutional policies and promotion bottlenecks, while Role Congruity Theory centres on the cognitive and evaluative processes that

generate prejudice at interpersonal and Organisational levels. Gender Role Theory, in contrast, prioritizes the role of socialization and normative conditioning across the lifespan, thereby extending the analysis beyond Organisational contexts. This divergence is essential in illuminating the study's nuanced findings: for example, the internalized role expectations captured by Gender Role Theory explain women's self-doubt or reluctance to seek leadership roles, while Role Congruity Theory explicates peer and institutional bias post-entry. These theoretical departures enrich the study by offering multilayered explanations of both the overt structural barriers and the subtle psychological dynamics that shape women's leadership outcomes.

## **2.3. Conceptual Review**

### **2.3.1. Career Progression**

Career progression has been widely conceptualised in recent literature as a multidimensional process that captures individuals' movement within and across professional hierarchies over time. For instance, Datta & Agarwal (2017), Scales-Nimoh (2024), and Ahmad & Saad (2020) described career progression as a dynamic interplay between individual aspirations, skill development, and Organisational support systems that facilitate vertical or lateral transitions in the workplace. Similarly, studies by Hirsch (2025) suggest that career progression reflects not only upward mobility but also lateral development and deepening expertise within a given field, emphasising the role of personal agency and institutional structures. Additionally, Ali & Anwar (2021) conceptualised career progression as the cumulative advancement of an employee's responsibilities, recognition, and rewards, which are influenced by internal motivations and external organisational policies. Collectively, these perspectives illustrate that career progression encompasses formal promotions, skill acquisition, role enrichment, and opportunities for personal growth.

Considering the above, it is worth noting that literature continues to cite career progression as a key indicator of employee engagement and organisational development (Ali & Anwar, 2021; Hirsch, 2025). While Hirsch (2025) highlights organisational structures and policy frameworks as facilitators of upward mobility, Ali & Anwar (2021) focus on the agency of the employee, contrasting external versus internal drivers of progression. This comparison points to a dichotomy in how scholars interpret the locus of control in career development. A critique of the literature, however, reveals that much of the existing discourse is disproportionately focused on formal structures (e.g., promotions, appraisals), often overlooking informal pathways such as mentoring and networking that also shape career trajectories. There is also a limited engagement with how intersectional factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and cultural expectations influence career progression. Connecting these insights, it becomes apparent that contemporary discourse on career progression adopts a more holistic lens, integrating structural, personal, and socio-cultural dimensions.

### **2.3.2. Women career progression**

Women's career progression involves the advancement and development of women within their professional fields over time (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). It includes stages such as entry-level positions, promotions, leadership roles, and achievements (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016), with women acquiring new skills and experiences to take on more influential roles. Overcoming obstacles like gender biases and work-life balance challenges is crucial for successful career progression. Strategies for advancement include pursuing higher education, seeking mentorship and sponsorship, networking, and advocating for opportunities (Carr et al., 2015). Employers' support, inclusive work environments, equitable opportunities, and mentorship programmes

are essential for fostering women's career progression. Ultimately, women's career progression leads to their full potential and significant contributions in their chosen fields.

### **2.3.2.1 Women career progression in advanced countries**

In advanced countries, there has been significant progress in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the workforce. Women have excelled in education, narrowing the gender gap, and providing a foundation for career advancement (Elder & Kring, 2016). Efforts to reduce the gender pay gap have gained momentum, but disparities persist, especially in leadership positions (Jayachandran, 2021). Flexible work arrangements have become more common, benefiting women in balancing career and family responsibilities (White & Maniam, 2020). Mentorship programmes and networking opportunities support women's career advancement, and there is an increasing focus on women's entrepreneurship (Andrade et al., 2019). Workforce diversity and inclusion initiatives have opened opportunities for women in various industries. Parental leave policies promote gender equality in parenting responsibilities (Ollier-Malaterre & Fourcreault, 2017). Efforts are made to encourage women's participation in STEM fields. Cultural shifts challenge traditional gender norms and expectations, empowering women to pursue their career aspirations (Ollier-Malaterre & Fourcreault, 2017). Governments implement policies, and advocacy drives positive change in advancing women's career progression. Leadership development programmes for women support their advancement into leadership roles. While challenges persist, the trends indicate progress towards greater gender equality and women's empowerment in advanced countries. Continuous efforts are essential to ensure equal opportunities for women's career advancement and leadership.

### **2.3.2.2. Women career progression in developing countries**

Women's career progression in Africa is influenced by diverse cultural, social, and economic factors, leading to disparities and challenges (Bastian et al., 2018). Limited access to education, traditional gender roles, and biased recruitment processes hinder career opportunities (Potts, 2018). Women are underrepresented in leadership positions, especially in rural areas, facing barriers in education and entrepreneurship (Fox & Kring, 2016). A gender wage gap persists, and cultural norms limit women's time for career advancement (Arndt et al., 2016). Lack of mentorship, work-life balance, and political representation hampers women's progress (Arndt et al., 2016). Gender-based violence and workplace harassment also affect career development. However, there are positive initiatives, including legal frameworks, women's networks, and advocacy efforts, working towards gender equality and supporting women's career advancement in Africa.

### **2.3.2.3. Women career progression in Ghana**

In Ghana, women face challenges in their career progression, including limited access to education, occupational segregation, a gender wage gap, underrepresentation in leadership positions, and work-life balance issues (Wold et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2019; Onditi & Odera, 2017). Cultural norms, biases, and societal expectations can restrict their career choices and opportunities (Walker et al., 2019). Sexual harassment in workplaces is prevalent and can negatively impact their professional growth (Onditi & Odera, 2017). Limited access to mentorship and role models also hampers their professional development (Blanchard & Blanchard, 2020). Women entrepreneurs face difficulties in accessing resources and financing (Isaga, 2019). Encouraging girls to pursue STEM education and providing support can increase their representation in these fields (Guenaga et al., 2022). Networking opportunities, policy

reforms, and shifting cultural attitudes play crucial roles in supporting women's career advancement in Ghana (Brion & Ampah-Mensah, 2021). Despite the challenges, stakeholders are actively working towards creating more equitable and supportive environments for women's career progression in Ghana (Ayentimi et al., 2020).

### **2.3.3. Overview of Tertiary Education**

Tertiary education, encompassing all formal post-secondary institutions such as universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools, has been globally recognized as a key driver of human capital development, innovation, and socio-economic transformation (Hazelkorn, 2023). Across advanced and developing nations, tertiary education serves as a cornerstone for building a skilled, adaptable workforce capable of meeting the demands of a rapidly evolving global knowledge economy (Chikoti, 2018). Not only does it provide individuals with relevant employment skills, but it also promotes civic engagement, environmental consciousness, and healthier lifestyles. The World Bank estimates that tertiary education yields the highest economic returns in the education sector, with graduates experiencing a 17% increase in earnings—surpassing returns at the primary (10%) and secondary (7%) levels (Grant, 2017). However, the global landscape also reflects disparities in access and quality. While governments worldwide pursue reforms to improve reach and efficiency, low-income populations remain underrepresented in tertiary systems, particularly in Latin America, the Caribbean, and parts of Asia, where enrollment inequalities persist.

In the African context, tertiary education assumes even greater urgency amid rapid demographic growth and rising demand for higher learning (Grant, 2017). The region faces the paradox of having the highest estimated return on tertiary education—approximately 21% increase in earnings—yet also the lowest enrollment rate globally,

with only 9% of eligible youth accessing higher education (Lambert, 2020). African nations, particularly in Sub-Saharan regions, are grappling with the dual challenge of expanding access to meet rising secondary completion rates while maintaining academic quality in resource-constrained environments (Adekanmbi, 2015). Governments and development partners have initiated substantial reforms, focusing on improving technical and vocational education as a viable complement to traditional academic paths. Nevertheless, structural barriers such as gender inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and weak linkages between institutions and labour markets continue to hinder progress (Collins, 2013). African tertiary education institutions are also expected to play a transformative role in social mobility and poverty alleviation; however, without comprehensive policies that address access, quality, and relevance, the region risks exacerbating existing inequalities (Chirau et al. 2018). Thus, ensuring equitable, inclusive, and labour-responsive tertiary education remains a pivotal concern for African policymakers and scholars alike.

In Ghana, the tertiary education system mirrors broader continental dynamics but also reflects distinct national priorities shaped by its developmental agenda. Public and private universities, polytechnics, and technical universities play critical roles in the country's education framework, with growing emphasis placed on vocational and technical skills acquisition to bridge the gap between academia and industry (Arthur & Arthur, 2016). Ghana has made notable progress in expanding tertiary education enrollment; however, issues of quality assurance, graduate employability, and funding sustainability persist. The Government of Ghana has undertaken reforms aimed at decentralizing education governance, diversifying programme offerings, and fostering partnerships between tertiary institutions and industries (Takyi et al. 2021). Despite these efforts, socioeconomic disparities and urban-rural divides continue to limit

access for marginalized groups. Moreover, the alignment of tertiary curricula with labour market needs remains inconsistent, prompting calls for continuous curricular reform and enhanced stakeholder engagement (Schmitt, 2024). Ghana's experience underscores the critical need to strategically harmonize equity, quality, and relevance in tertiary education to fully leverage its potential for national development.

#### **2.3.4. Overview of Technical University Systems**

Technical universities, by design and designation, are specialized higher education institutions dedicated to delivering practice-oriented and career-focused training (Likhacheva et al. 2020). Globally, they are institutions mandated to bridge the gap between academia and industry, fostering innovation and economic development (Paryono, 2017). In developing countries, technical universities have emerged as key drivers of skills development, addressing youth unemployment and industrial growth (Forhad et al. 2022). In the Ghanaian context, their emergence reflects both a historic necessity and a strategic policy response to national development imperatives (Ansah, 2012). These institutions evolved from polytechnics, which, prior to 1992, functioned as post-secondary entities offering non-tertiary, middle-level manpower training aimed at bridging technical skill deficits.

Crucially, the enactment of the Polytechnic Law (PNDC Law 321) in 1992 formalized the status of polytechnics within Ghana's educational system, authorizing them to award Higher National Diplomas (Bentum-Micah et al. 2024). However, this legal framework proved insufficient in confronting the multifaceted challenges of graduate unemployment, skill mismatch, and industrial underperformance. Consequently, the educational reform of 2007 repealed PNDC Law 321 and introduced Act 745, granting polytechnics autonomy and the authority to offer Bachelor of Technology (B-

Tech) degrees. This transformation signalled a paradigm shift—from diploma-issuing institutions to fully-fledged tertiary institutions with a mandate to produce technically proficient graduates for an increasingly competitive and technology-driven global economy.

Moreover, the shift towards technical universities is not an isolated phenomenon. It is consonant with global trends wherein countries such as Germany and Finland have long recognized the indispensable value of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in driving innovation, productivity, and sustainable growth (Addai, 2024). Addai further postulated that, Ghana's decision to convert all ten polytechnics into technical universities—based on rigorous criteria—was both timely and necessary.

Considering the above, it is worth noting that, Ghana's technical universities are not mere academic institutions; they are engines of industrial transformation. Their existence and evolution encapsulate a deliberate effort to reposition technical education as a cornerstone of socio-economic advancement. In an era where knowledge must translate into innovation and employability, the role of technical universities is not only relevant but profoundly indispensable.

### **2.3.5. The Fundamental Role of Technical Universities**

Technical universities play a pivotal role in aligning higher education with national development goals by prioritizing career-focused, industry-relevant training. Unlike traditional universities that emphasize theoretical constructs, technical universities emphasize the acquisition of practical skills and competencies essential for direct application in the labour market. In global contexts, similar models have proven effective. Michelsen et al. (2018) describe how vocational institutions in Nordic

countries support industrial innovation and social cohesion. Ghana's adaptation of this model through its technical universities signals a strategic effort to align with global best practices. As highlighted by Bentum-Micah et al. (2024), the transformation of polytechnics into technical universities in Ghana was a deliberate policy move aimed at equipping graduates with employable skills that match the industrial needs of a growing economy. These institutions are instrumental in addressing the persistent skills mismatch that hampers youth employability and national productivity. By offering programmes that combine academic instruction with hands-on training, technical universities ensure that graduates are not only knowledgeable but also capable of responding effectively to workplace demands (Addai, 2024). Paryono (2017) asserts that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), which underpins technical universities, contributes significantly to sustainable development by promoting economic inclusion and innovation. Moreover, technical universities serve as key drivers of applied research and community engagement. Through partnerships with industries and local communities, they generate solutions that address pressing national challenges. According to Iddrisu et al. (2014), these collaborations enable institutions to remain responsive to changing economic needs while contributing to local development. Likhacheva et al. (2020) emphasize the value of polytechnic education in integrating theory with technical practice, fostering both individual advancement and national progress. The literature critically points out that; technical universities are not mere extensions of the academic system but are essential institutions driving Ghana's socio-economic transformation. Their dual focus on skill development and applied research positions them as key actors in fostering national resilience, reducing unemployment, and achieving industrial growth. As Ansah (2012) and Bentum-Micah et al. (2024) affirm, the success of

Ghana's educational reform hinges on the sustained support and strategic evolution of these institutions.

## **2.4. Empirical review**

### **2.4.1. Evolution in the Representation of Women in Senior Management**

#### **Positions**

The representation of women in senior management positions has undergone a considerable evolution over the past few decades. Initially, women were systematically excluded from leadership due to legal, institutional, and cultural barriers. Early strides toward equality were made through feminist movements and policy reforms that emphasized equal rights in employment and education (Madsen, 2019). These efforts laid the groundwork for greater inclusion, leading to the enactment of legislation that prohibited gender-based discrimination in the workplace (Adeniyi et al., 2024). A significant shift occurred during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, where the focus transitioned from legal access to Organisational transformation. Scholars began to emphasize the importance of gender diversity as a business imperative, citing studies that linked diverse leadership teams to improved innovation, decision-making, and financial performance (Vieira et al., 2022; Al Amosh, 2025). As a result, many Organisations implemented gender equity programmes, leadership training for women, and mentorship initiatives to boost female participation in top-tier roles (De Silva, 2024).

Intersectionality has gained prominence as a framework to analyse the experiences of women with compounded identities such as race, class, and ethnicity. Crenshaw's (2017) conceptualization of intersectionality illustrates that the barriers women face is not monolithic but are influenced by overlapping systems of oppression. As such, women of colour and those from marginalized communities often encounter

additional challenges in advancing to senior positions (Alfred et al., 2019). Despite these advancements, disparities remain. While some studies acknowledge an upward trend in female representation (Sojo et al., 2016), others highlight persistent issues such as tokenism, pay inequality, and the glass ceiling effect (Grangeiro, 2022; Kocanci et al., 2025). The divergence in these findings reflects variations in Organisational commitment, regional policy frameworks, and cultural attitudes toward gender roles.

From the foregoing, the evolution in women's representation in senior management reflects both progress and stagnation. There is increasing awareness of the benefits of gender-inclusive leadership, but structural and socio-cultural obstacles persist. The researcher, therefore, posits that sustainable gender parity requires an intersectional approach, the institutionalization of equity practices, and the reengineering of Organisational cultures to foster inclusive environments.

#### **2.4.2. Women's Underrepresentation in the World**

Women's underrepresentation in the workforce, particularly in leadership, is deeply embedded in historical and socio-cultural narratives. In pre-colonial African societies, gender roles were demarcated, with leadership seen predominantly as a male preserve. Colonialism and its accompanying systems further entrenched these divisions by limiting women's access to formal education and economic opportunities (Strangio, 2025; Julius, 2025).

Although modern advocacy has led to progress in women's rights, including international commitments such as CEDAW and the SDGs, deep-rooted patriarchal norms remain significant barriers. Gender disparities in education continue to affect women's career prospects, with fewer women attaining qualifications necessary for leadership (Barkhuizen, et al., 2022). Research in Ghana shows that female

professionals often encounter stereotype-based resistance that hinders their progression, despite demonstrated competence and leadership potential (Conduah, 2024; Adu et al., 2025).

Across sectors, similar challenges emerge. In academia, women occupy a small proportion of leadership roles, with promotion processes often influenced by informal networks and subjective evaluations (Van Helden et al., 2023). Globally, academia mirrors this trend, with men dominating senior academic ranks and governance structures (Allen et al., 2021).

In the healthcare and political sectors, systemic constraints such as wage gaps, limited leadership training, and gendered Organisational cultures restrict women's upward mobility (Smith & Sinkford, 2022). Despite high female participation in healthcare as a profession, decision-making remains male-dominated. These inequalities are further reinforced by cultural expectations and caregiving responsibilities traditionally assigned to women (Aziz, 2023).

On the global stage, studies confirm that the barriers facing women in leadership are not confined to the Global South. Even in advanced economies, women report challenges including work-life balance, occupational segregation, and limited mentorship (Kossek & Lee, 2022; Chelladurai & Kalidasan, 2023). Nonetheless, some countries have adopted affirmative action policies such as quotas and leadership pipelines with varying degrees of success (Hersch, 2021; Alemu et al., 2022). In Ghana, despite the ratification of international conventions and the development of gender-sensitive policies, implementation gaps persist. Negative cultural attitudes toward women in authority remain prevalent in politics, religion, and the private sector (Koburtay et al., 2023).

Researchers have advocated for stronger institutional frameworks and deliberate efforts to foster gender-inclusive leadership (Chikwe et al., 2024; Gooty, 2023). This implies that, while progress has been made globally and locally, women remain underrepresented in leadership. The literature highlights both structural barriers and socio-cultural constraints as critical factors. As a researcher, I argue that policies must go beyond rhetoric to address the everyday experiences of exclusion that women face in the workplace. By centering women's voices and experiences in policymaking and Organisational design, we can chart a path toward more equitable workspaces.

Empirical studies across Africa consistently demonstrate that women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions within higher education institutions despite notable progress in educational attainment and workforce participation. For example, Morley et al. (2017) found that women's participation in university leadership across sub-Saharan Africa remains constrained by entrenched patriarchal institutional cultures, limited access to professional networks, and gendered perceptions of leadership competence. Similarly, Botha (2017) observed in South African universities that women academics often encounter structural barriers such as exclusion from influential decision-making networks and limited mentorship opportunities, which slow their progression into senior management roles. In Kenya, Onsongo (2009) reported that although women increasingly enter academia, their advancement into leadership positions remains limited due to institutional biases and traditional expectations surrounding gender roles. These African studies collectively highlight that gender disparities in academic leadership are not solely a function of individual capability but are shaped by broader institutional and socio-cultural dynamics that continue to privilege male leadership norms across universities in the region.

In the Ghanaian context, empirical evidence similarly points to persistent gender imbalances in university leadership. Studies by Adusei-Asante et al. (2015) and Morley (2013) indicate that women academics in Ghana often face structural constraints such as limited access to mentorship, fewer opportunities for leadership development, and gendered expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over professional advancement. Boakye-Djan (2020) further noted that leadership selection processes in some Ghanaian universities tend to favour men due to implicit biases that associate leadership with masculine traits. However, some studies also highlight emerging institutional efforts aimed at addressing these disparities. For instance, Tagoe and Abakah (2015) observed that certain Ghanaian universities have introduced gender mainstreaming initiatives and leadership training programmes to encourage women's participation in decision-making roles. While these initiatives have contributed to gradual improvements, the pace of change remains slow, and women continue to occupy a disproportionately small share of senior academic leadership positions.

A synthesis of the African and Ghanaian literature reveals both converging and diverging perspectives regarding women's leadership progression in higher education. Across most studies, there is strong agreement that institutional cultures, gender stereotypes, and limited professional support structures constitute major barriers to women's advancement into leadership roles (Botha, 2017; Morley et al., 2017; Adusei-Asante et al., 2015). However, some scholars emphasize individual and professional development factors—such as mentorship, networking, and leadership training—as potential pathways for overcoming these barriers (Tagoe & Abakah, 2015). Although these enabling factors have been documented in general university settings, comparatively fewer studies have examined how such dynamics operate

within Technical Universities, which often maintain historically male-dominated academic environments and technical disciplines. Consequently, while the existing literature provides valuable insights into women's leadership experiences in African universities broadly, there remains limited empirical understanding of how institutional cultures, structural barriers, and support mechanisms specifically influence women's career progression in Ghana's Technical Universities. This gap underscores the need for context-specific research that explores women's leadership trajectories within these specialized higher education institutions.

### **2.4.3. Barriers to Women's Career Progression**

This section of the empirical review examines studies that identify and analyse barriers hindering women's career progression. It focuses on structural, Organisational, and socio-cultural constraints across sectors, particularly within the Ghanaian context. The review highlights recurring themes such as gender inequality, workplace biases, leadership stereotypes, and work-family conflict limiting women's advancement.

#### **2.4.3.1. Gender Inequality**

Gender inequality remains a persistent barrier to women's career advancement globally. While legislative instruments and international conventions such as CEDAW have been instrumental in promoting gender equity, the practical realization of equality in the workplace remains elusive. Studies have shown that deeply embedded structural inequalities manifest through occupational segregation, gendered roles, and limited educational access for women (Puzio & Valshtein, 2022; Hina et al., 2025). These disparities are compounded by workplace hostility, including harassment, and a lack of effective accountability mechanisms that create unsafe environments for women (Täuber et al., 2022). The similarities among these studies highlight how

socio-cultural norms reinforce gendered expectations and suppress women's upward mobility. For instance, women are often denied leadership roles not due to incompetence but because of traditional assumptions about their roles in society (Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

In contrast, other studies argue that institutional reforms alone are insufficient without corresponding shifts in societal attitudes (Asonitou, 2022). The key difference lies in the emphasis on either structural interventions or cultural change as primary solutions. Considering the above, while gender equality policies exist, their implementation is undermined by socio-cultural resistance and institutional inertia. As a researcher, it is evident that addressing gender inequality requires a dual approach that combines policy reform with targeted community engagement to deconstruct harmful gender norms.

#### **2.4.3.2. Organisational Barriers**

Organisational culture significantly influences women's career progression. Research shows that institutional norms often prioritize masculine leadership traits, thereby marginalizing women's contributions and leadership styles (Adusah-Karikari & Ohemeng, 2014). These male-dominated cultures value long working hours and competitiveness, sidelining collaborative or transformational leadership often associated with women (Adusah-Karikari, 2014; Liem, 2025) These studies converge on the notion that Organisational structures and recruitment policies systematically disadvantage women. A key similarity across studies is the absence of female mentors and the existence of informal networks that exclude women from decision-making spaces (Player et al., 2019; Hakak et al., 2010). However, Adusah-Karikari (2014) underscores a unique perspective by linking these Organisational practices with broader national development agendas that neglect gender-inclusive leadership. Thus,

addressing Organisational barriers involves more than changing recruitment strategies; it requires a rethinking of workplace culture and leadership paradigms. As a researcher, I contend that Organisational transformation must integrate gender-sensitive leadership development and mentorship frameworks to ensure inclusivity.

#### **2.4.3.3. Globalisation**

Globalization has expanded the horizons of professional opportunities but has also intensified the challenges faced by women in their career progression. The duality of globalization is evident: while it promotes cross-border professional mobility, it also demands relocation, long work hours, and intercultural adaptability, often clashing with women's domestic responsibilities (Mabkhot & Al-Ameryeen, 2023; Kossek et al. (2017). The studies reviewed consistently indicate that women experience globalization differently than men. A shared observation is the underrepresentation of women in global executive roles due to cultural constraints and mobility restrictions (Bader et al. (2024). However, while Mabkhot & Al-Ameryeen (2023) emphasizes systemic bias in global corporate structures, Kossek et al. (2017) highlight the lack of institutional support systems for women pursuing international roles. This implies that, globalization's benefits are not inherently accessible to all; they require intentional Organisational and policy frameworks that account for gendered realities. My position as a researcher is that globalization must be paired with inclusive policy measures that support work-life integration and gender equity in international leadership spaces.

#### **2.4.3.4. Assertiveness as a Barrier to Women's Advancement**

Assertiveness has been identified as both a strength and a challenge for women navigating male-dominated professional environments. Research reveals that women are often penalized for assertiveness, being labelled as aggressive or unfeminine,

while a lack of assertiveness is viewed as a lack of leadership potential (Gembalska-Kwiecień, 2024; Boateng, 2018). The convergence in the literature indicates that assertiveness is contextually interpreted through gendered lenses. Boateng (2018) and Gembalska-Kwiecień, (2024) agree that societal expectations discourage women from self-promotion, pushing them to advocate for others more readily than for themselves. Differences emerge in suggested interventions. Gembalska-Kwiecień advocate for assertiveness training, while Boateng (2018) suggests redefinition of leadership norms to include diverse communication styles. Thus, women's assertiveness should not be evaluated through traditional masculine benchmarks. Based on the above, the researcher argues for leadership frameworks that validate diverse expressions of authority, thus dismantling the punitive assessments of assertive women.

#### **2.4.3.5. Personal/Individual Factors as a Barrier**

Individual traits such as confidence, resilience, and ambition influence career trajectories. However, focusing solely on these traits' risks oversimplifying the systemic issues women face. Literature shows that while personality traits contribute to leadership success, they are often judged more critically in women (Mohan et al., 2023; Thelma & Ngulube, 2024; Bracken et al., 2023). Similarities among studies lie in acknowledging how internalized biases and limited mentorship hinder self-efficacy among women. However, differences exist in their analytic frameworks. The former uses a psychological approach, while the latter incorporates feminist theoretical analysis. Thus, although personal factors play a role, they must be contextualized within broader systemic barriers. As a researcher, I believe that empowering women through mentorship, supportive networks, and institutional backing is more effective than merely emphasizing individual resilience.

#### **2.4.3.6. Stereotypes, Prejudices, and Biases**

Gender stereotypes remain among the most deeply rooted barriers to women's career progression. Social role theory posits that gendered expectations prescribe communal traits for women and agentic traits for men, thereby framing leadership as a male domain (Anglin et al., 2022; Robinson, 2025). The literature agrees that stereotypes contribute to hiring biases, unequal promotions, and marginalization in decision-making roles. Anglin et al. (2022) and Robinson (2025) both show that women in leadership are judged more harshly and given fewer opportunities. The key difference lies in the solution pathways: while Anglin et al. (2022) promote stereotype threat mitigation through diversity training, Robinson (2025) emphasizes structural policy reform. Conclusively, dismantling stereotypes requires both perceptual and institutional changes. As a researcher, I assert that awareness campaigns, leadership evaluations, and inclusive metrics are vital in shifting biased perceptions.

#### **2.4.3.7. Work-Family Conflict**

Work-family conflict is a persistent issue affecting women more significantly due to traditional caregiving expectations. While the workforce has evolved to include more women in full-time employment, domestic responsibilities remain disproportionately assigned to them (Loh et al., 2024; Goldin, 2024). These studies uniformly affirm the dual burden women face. Spillover theory is supported by evidence showing how family demands affect workplace performance and vice versa (Song et al., 2023). Vyas (2022) however, emphasize that under the right policies, work can support family life. The main difference lies in the degree of optimism regarding current workplace reforms. From the foregoing, it is worth noting that, meaningful progress requires holistic policies such as flexible work schedules, paternal leave, and gender-neutral caregiving policies. From a scholarly standpoint, I advocate for a cultural shift

in both workplaces and households to normalize shared responsibilities and enable career progression for women.

#### **2.4.4. Factors affecting women career progression**

The trajectory of women's academic career progression remains shaped by a confluence of educational, cultural, and familial factors. As Jarness & Strømme (2022) affirms, early exposure to academic culture and capital significantly advantages certain groups, particularly those with access to elite educational environments. This aligns with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and field (Tilbrook & Shifrer, 2022), which emphasizes how institutional structures privilege those whose upbringing aligns with dominant academic norms. Cabrera (2021) extends this line of thought by critiquing universities for maintaining class-based cultural expectations, thus marginalizing students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Collectively, these studies underline how deeply embedded cultural and institutional norms influence women's access to and progression within academic spaces.

In contrast to the macro-level institutional focus, recent empirical work has highlighted the micro-level role of the family in shaping women's academic career paths. For instance, Fernández et al. (2023) and Drake & Svenkerud (2024), in a study conducted across higher education institutions in Europe, identified that financial support, familial expectations, and household responsibilities heavily influenced women's academic ambitions. Similarly, Paksi et al. (2022) examined how cultural values within families could either restrict or bolster women's aspirations, particularly in STEM fields. These findings reflect a nuanced duality: while institutional barriers persist, the role of familial structures remains equally potent. Hence, both institutional

and family dynamics jointly create a systemic framework that shapes, facilitates, or impedes academic progression.

Notably, the family operates both as an enabler and a gatekeeper. Usman (2025) observed that in lower-income households, educational pursuits beyond undergraduate levels were often discouraged due to economic constraints and gendered expectations. This is supported by Jones & Maguire (2021) who found that women from working-class backgrounds reported feeling obligated to prioritize caregiving roles over academic ambitions. These sentiments echo Vekiri et al. (2022) findings that gender stereotypes within familial settings significantly influence perceived role suitability, often steering women away from careers perceived as intellectually rigorous or time-demanding.

A growing body of literature also emphasizes the interplay between familial occupational exposure and career aspirations. For example, Bao & Wang (2022) found that daughters of academic parents were significantly more likely to pursue research careers themselves, given the normalization of academic discourse and expectations within the home. This aligns with the concept of “habitus,” where repeated exposure to particular norms and values fosters internalized dispositions toward specific life paths (Carlson & Schneickert, 2021). Walker et al. (2022). confirmed this trend in South Africa, showing that female students with role models in academia were more likely to perceive academic careers as attainable and desirable.

However, the transmission of academic interest is not uniformly beneficial. While some families promote academic pursuit, others encourage entry into more practical or caregiving professions, such as nursing or teaching. Iddrisu et al., (2025), for

instance, reported that while familial support motivated women to enter nursing, it rarely aligned with long-term academic goals such as research or postgraduate education. This suggests a bifurcated impact of familial influence: support may ease entry into a profession but may not equip women with the skills or aspirations needed for academic progression. Such findings parallel conclusions from (Bae et al., 2022) who emphasize the need for academic institutions to bridge the gap between occupational initiation and academic preparedness.

This contrast underscores the heterogeneous nature of familial influence. Whereas some family environments encourage rigorous academic careers, others emphasize immediate income generation or conform to cultural norms that limit female ambition. These divergent pathways reinforce the idea that institutional interventions must account for diverse familial legacies. Programmes such as early mentorship, academic orientation, and research training become critical, particularly for students from non-academic families (Lee et al., 2022).

Additionally, several studies suggest that institutional culture can mediate the effect of familial influence. Casad et al. (2021) argue that gendered Organisational norms and recruitment biases in academia further exacerbate the challenges women face, especially those without the cultural capital to navigate these environments. Murphy et al. (2022) support this assertion, highlighting that female academics often face subtle yet persistent forms of exclusion, such as limited access to mentoring networks or research collaborations. These barriers, when coupled with limited familial academic exposure, can significantly delay or derail career progression.

The cumulative literature reviewed illustrates that women's career progression in academia is not a matter of individual merit alone. Rather, it is contingent upon a

complex interplay of familial support, cultural capital, institutional inclusivity, and socio-economic structures. The similarities across studies affirm that cultural norms, parental education, and access to resources play foundational roles in shaping career trajectories. The differences, however, emerge in the specificity of these influences—whether they enable or constrain, and how they manifest across different socio-cultural settings.

Overall, while family remains a foundational influence on women's academic career progression, it cannot single-handedly mitigate the barriers posed by institutional cultures and systemic inequities. As a researcher, I posit that sustainable change requires dual-level interventions: policies that democratize access to academic mentorship and resources, and family-oriented career guidance that reshapes gendered expectations. Institutions must recognize and respond to the diversity of student backgrounds, particularly for women from underrepresented and lower-income groups. Only by addressing both familial and institutional dimensions can we begin to dismantle the entrenched barriers to women's academic advancement.

#### **2.4.5. Factors Hindering Women Career Progression**

Women's academic career progression remains constrained by multifaceted systemic, institutional, and cultural barriers. These constraints begin with early-career precarity and extend across the academic life cycle. Empirical studies provide consistent evidence of gender-based disparities, reinforcing the enduring nature of these challenges.

##### **2.4.5.1. Structural and Institutional Constraints**

Empirical studies demonstrate that early career academic positions often marginalize women through exploitative labour practices. Research have shown that, women are typically relegated to disciplines with limited research capital, thus restricting their

long-term career trajectories (Woldegiorgis, 2025). Similarly, Ni et al. (2021) found that women in postdoctoral roles are often assigned routine tasks and denied authorship. Jin & Ball (2021) offer a slightly more optimistic view, suggesting that precarious positions can still foster academic habitus when institutional support is robust. However, most studies converge on the idea that institutional gatekeeping, gendered role assignments, and undervaluation of women's work are primary inhibitors of career progression. Differences among academic researchers lie in the extent to which internal versus external factors are emphasized. While Angervall et al. emphasize institutional structures, O'Meara et al. explore how internalized perceptions of competitiveness and academic fit affect women's decisions to pursue or remain in academia. The convergence of both perspectives underscores the duality of structural and psychological deterrents.

#### **2.4.5.2. Mobility and Career Advancement**

Academic mobility is widely recognized as a determinant of career advancement, yet access to this mobility is gendered. Dias Lopes & Hancock (2024) and Khlgtatian (2024) view international mobility as a critical mechanism for building research capital and academic visibility. However, Koshmaganbetova et al. (2024) highlight that caregiving responsibilities and socioeconomic constraints disproportionately hinder women's participation in such opportunities. This inequity is further supported by Qudsia (2024), who argue that while mobility fosters institutional prestige, it remains largely inaccessible to women, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Considering the above, differences arise in disciplinary contexts. Ananthram et al. (2024) emphasize the need for mobility in STEM fields, Lee, S., Gifford & Flood (2024) demonstrate that allied health researchers can build meaningful careers through local collaborations. This contrast reveals the necessity

for more nuanced institutional mobility policies that recognize disciplinary diversity and caregiving realities. Yaddar (2025) support this by noting that women in feminized disciplines such as education often suffer wage and promotion penalties, partly because their work is localized and undervalued. Overall, mobility remains a valorised academic expectation, yet it fails to accommodate the gendered realities many women face. Recalibrating institutional reward systems to value place-based research and caregiving roles is essential to achieving genuine equity.

#### **2.4.5.3. Gender Norms and Professional Cultures**

The intersection of gender norms and academic culture further complicates women's career advancement. Khan et al. (2025) argues that women's loyalty to institutions, driven by relational commitments, often leads them to endure inequitable conditions rather than seek alternative opportunities. Tijani (2024) support this view, emphasizing how the competitive and masculine ethos of academia favors assertiveness and self-promotion—traits traditionally associated with male academic success. Empirical studies also show that women tend to create collaborative and emotionally supportive academic environments. Banks (2025) highlight the under-recognition of such forms of social capital in promotion structures.

Also, Delaney (2025) and Woods Jr et al. (2024) further demonstrate that women disproportionately take on teaching and service roles, which, though rhetorically valued, are marginalized in decisions related to promotion and tenure. Differences emerge in how these dynamics are interpreted. While Agudín-Colmenares (2024) and Karinshak et al. (2024) critique the cultural alignment of assertiveness with merit, Marie et al. (2024) argue that women can succeed by adopting transformational leadership styles, which blend collaboration with strategic assertiveness. However, the overarching pattern remains: academia's reward systems are misaligned with the

relational labour often performed by women, necessitating a redefinition of academic excellence to include emotional and social contributions.

#### **2.4.5.4. Discrimination and Leadership Barriers**

Overt and covert discrimination continues to shape women's trajectories in academia, particularly in accessing leadership roles. Barclay et al., (2025) found that male academics often use successful male peers as performance benchmarks, sidelining women's achievements. Promotion and hiring processes often lack transparency, and even gender-balanced committees can reinforce patriarchal standards if cultural norms remain unchallenged (Okoro, 2025).

Supporting this, Haynes (2024) documented how women who challenge sexist norms are often labelled as problematic, contributing to emotional exhaustion and professional isolation. Miyake et al. (2025) discuss the prevalence of everyday sexism and microaggressions that cumulatively erode women's confidence. Thakur & Goyal (2025) also found that women are expected to perform caregiving roles both at work and home, creating a dual burden that male counterparts rarely face.

While some studies, such as Shepherd (2017), advocate for women-focused support programmes, others like DeAro et al. (2019) and Raihan et al. (2025) stress that equity requires systemic transformation. Universities must address embedded patriarchal practices in hiring, mentoring, and leadership development to ensure meaningful gender equity.

Considering the above, the reviewed literature consistently identifies structural, cultural, and individual-level barriers to women's career progression in academia. Similarities across studies reveal entrenched patterns of undervaluation, gendered expectations, and discriminatory practices. Where differences exist, they often reflect

disciplinary variations or methodological emphases. These findings indicate that while individual resilience and mentorship are valuable, they are insufficient to counteract systemic exclusion.

As a researcher, I position myself within a transformative feminist paradigm that recognizes the need for both structural reform and cultural change. The literature underscores that tokenistic interventions will not suffice; instead, a holistic reimagining of academic merit, mobility, and leadership is necessary. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that examine the effectiveness of inclusive policies and explore how institutional culture shifts can support diverse forms of academic contribution.

By drawing inferences from this empirical review, it becomes clear that true equity in academic careers cannot be achieved without dismantling the gendered norms and institutional structures that continue to privilege male trajectories. My contribution to this field will be to advocate for and investigate context-specific interventions that align with the lived realities of female academics across disciplines.

#### **2.4.6 Factors that Enhance Women's Academic Career Progression**

This section of the literature review explores how organisational, relational, developmental, and emotional dimensions influence women's academic career progression. It highlights emerging themes and researcher perspectives while identifying systemic factors that either constrain or advance women's career trajectories.

##### **2.4.6.1 Organisational Factors**

Organisational culture, policies, and leadership practices play pivotal roles in shaping women's academic mobility. Empirical studies support the notion that institutional

reforms are more effective when they address systemic barriers rather than focusing solely on individual adaptation. For instance, Adongo et al. (2023) and Smith (2025) argued that promotion and leadership opportunities are influenced by entrenched patriarchal norms embedded within academic hierarchies. Similarly, McCabe (2024) highlights how gender-blind institutional cultures suppress the visibility of women's contributions, calling for gender-mainstreamed governance structures.

A consistent theme across studies is the need for equity-driven policies that extend beyond performative gestures. Davenport et al. (2022) and Thelma & Ngulube (2024) argue for leadership accountability in evaluating recruitment, promotion, and remuneration equity. Measures such as transparent hiring practices, gender-disaggregated audits, and inclusive leadership training have shown positive outcomes in bridging gender gaps. Moreover, family-responsive policies including flexible tenure clocks, maternity support, and childcare services enable women to navigate caregiving and career demands (Wullert et al., 2024).

Differences emerge in the extent of organisational change across geographic and disciplinary contexts. While Nordic countries report institutional shifts toward equity, universities in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia still reflect male-dominated norms (Yahya et al., 2024; Ndjama & Ajani, 2025). These disparities signal a global need for context-sensitive reforms. This research advocates a dual strategy that combines structural interventions to dismantle institutional bias with robust individual support systems. As a researcher, I posit that policy reforms must be reinforced with inclusive leadership and data-informed practices to ensure sustainable gender equity.

#### **2.4.6.2 Mentorship, Role Models, and Social Networking**

Mentorship and social networks are widely documented as enablers of women's career progression. Effective mentorship offers emotional, career, and psychosocial support, especially in male-dominated environments. Shen et al. (2022) found that women mentees with access to senior academic women report higher confidence and professional integration. Similarly, Maryna et al. (2024) emphasise mentorship's role in building academic identity and reducing attrition.

A critical insight is the distinction between mentorship and sponsorship. While mentorship fosters personal growth, sponsorship entails advocacy and direct access to career-enhancing opportunities. According to Griffeth et al. (2021), sponsorship correlates more directly with leadership ascension. However, sponsorship remains underdeveloped in many academic systems, especially for minority women.

Research also critiques the over-reliance on female mentors, which can unintentionally overburden senior women (Babatope, 2025). Moreover, when mentoring is not institutionalised, its reach is limited to informal networks, potentially excluding underrepresented groups. Inclusive mentoring frameworks (Radlick & Mevatne, 2023) and structured social networks foster shared learning, reduce isolation, and promote cross-gender collaboration. Drawing from above, it is apparent that mentorship and networking facilitate career advancement through visibility, guidance, and empowerment. As a researcher, I advocate for embedded mentoring cultures supported by formalised institutional backing, ensuring equity and accountability.

### **2.4.6.3 Career Development Opportunities**

Career development for women in academia is best supported when leadership programmes are intentionally inclusive and tailored to address systemic inequalities. Recent studies such as Joseph (2023) and Mousa et al. (2021) underscore the effectiveness of leadership training that integrates personal agency with organisational change. These programmes offer skill development, leadership confidence, and opportunities to challenge prevailing gender norms.

Empirical evidence shows that structured programmes increase women's academic productivity, networking, and leadership engagement (Margolis, 2021). Additionally, participation in cross-institutional training broadens exposure and visibility. However, linear career models still dominate academic institutions, privileging uninterrupted trajectories that disadvantage women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities (Liani et al., 2021; Ford et al., 2021).

Differences arise in how leadership potential is perceived and evaluated across institutions. In male-dominated disciplines like engineering or economics, women's leadership capabilities are often questioned, necessitating repeated credentialing (Starks (2021)). Furthermore, gender stereotypes influence self-assessment and access to leadership roles, reinforcing career stagnation.

Summarily, institutional investment in personalised leadership development, complemented by cultural transformation, enhances women's long-term academic engagement. I contend that women's career development must be de-linked from traditional trajectories and evaluated using diverse metrics that acknowledge complexity, caregiving, and interdisciplinary contributions.

#### 2.4.6.4 Emotional Support

Emotional support has emerged as an essential, albeit undervalued, contributor to women's academic retention and success. In academic contexts often marked by isolation and competition, emotional resilience is fostered through shared narratives, collective affirmation, and peer solidarity. Moustafa et al. (2024) affirm that emotional support mitigates burnout, while fostering mental health and job satisfaction. Support groups, writing circles, and informal peer mentorship are particularly effective in affirming identity and providing practical coping strategies (Halsall et al., 2023; Barbaresos et al., 2023). Such communities create safe spaces that defy the hypercompetitive academic culture, allowing for vulnerability and empathy. However, emotional labour is rarely recognised in performance evaluations, thereby marginalising the communal contributions that sustain academic ecosystems (França et al., 2023).

Gendered expectations often pressure women to perform both academic and emotional roles, particularly as mentors and department leaders. This dual burden, if unacknowledged, contributes to dissatisfaction and attrition. Calls for institutional validation of emotional contributions are growing (Ruork et al., 2025; Ueda et al., 2024), with recommendations for integrating emotional wellness into organisational metrics.

From the literature critically analysed, it is worth noting that emotional support is not ancillary but central to academic thriving. As a researcher, I recommend formal integration of emotional labour into faculty development and promotion frameworks, ensuring that care work is equitably recognised.

## 2.5. Conceptual framework

In qualitative research, a conceptual framework refers to a set of concepts that guide a research study (Fuertes et al. 2020). It provides a foundation for understanding and interpreting the research findings within a specific context or theoretical perspective.

The conceptual framework for the study is presented in Figure 1.



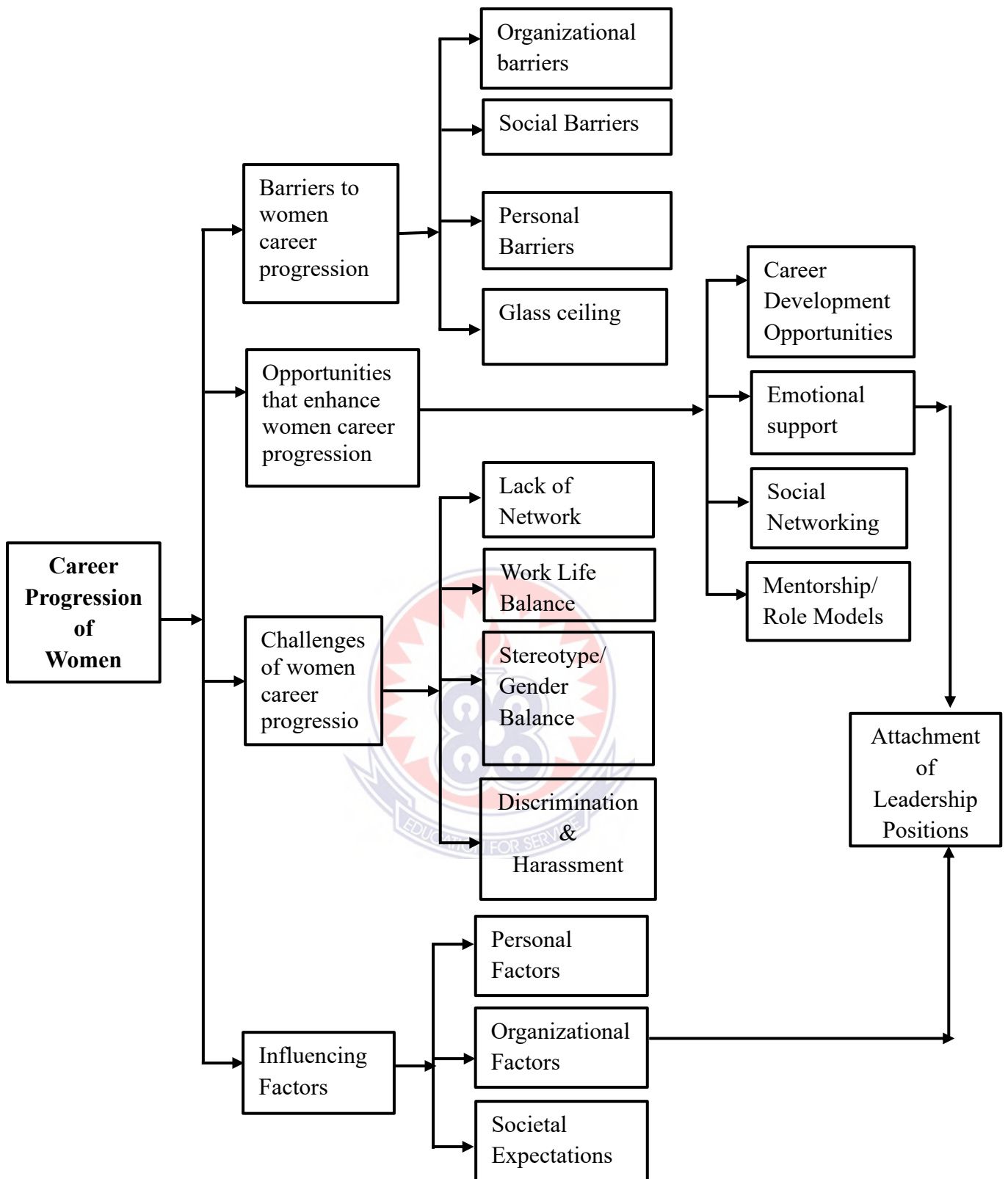


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Author's own construct (2024).

The conceptual framework illustrates that women's career progression is influenced by interrelated personal, societal, and Organisational determinants. At the personal

level, attributes such as educational attainment, self-efficacy, and professional aspirations critically shape career trajectories. These individual variables are not isolated but interact dynamically with societal structures. Societal influences—such as entrenched gender roles and normative expectations—continue to relegate women to subordinate occupational statuses. These socio-cultural pressures reinforce internalized limitations, impeding ambition and upward mobility. Organisational factors complete this triad by institutionalizing biases through exclusionary practices, limited female-friendly policies, and underrepresentation in leadership pipelines. Thus, the framework underscores that women's career progression is not merely a matter of personal agency but a systemic issue, rooted in the confluence of socio-structural and institutionalized gender inequalities. In the context of Technical Universities, understanding these interdependencies is critical to designing interventions that dismantle entrenched barriers and create equitable pathways to leadership.

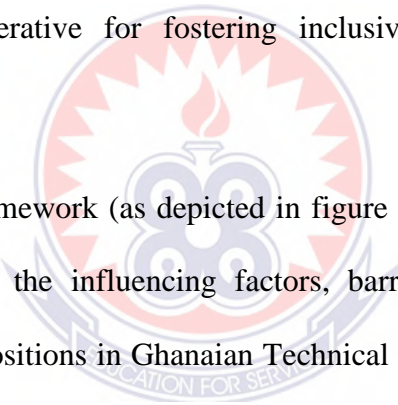
The framework compellingly depicts the multidimensional challenges women face in advancing within Technical Universities. Chief among these is the persistence of gender stereotypes, which insidiously delegitimize women's leadership capabilities and entrench gendered perceptions of authority. Such stereotypes are not benign—they operationalize as discriminatory practices that curtail promotional opportunities and undermine professional credibility. Discrimination and harassment—ranging from subtle exclusion to overt hostility further degrade women's workplace experiences, compromising both psychological safety and institutional belonging. Moreover, the demand to achieve work-life equilibrium disproportionately burdens women, often forcing difficult trade-offs between domestic obligations and professional aspirations. The framework also highlights the lack of strategic

networking, which limits women's access to informal power structures, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing spaces. These compounded challenges are neither incidental nor individual; they are structural impediments that must be addressed through institutional accountability and gender-responsive leadership reforms within Technical Universities.

The framework unearths entrenched barriers that systematically obstruct women's ascent to leadership roles in Ghanaian Technical Universities. The "glass ceiling" metaphor encapsulates the invisible yet formidable structural limits imposed on women, regardless of merit or qualifications. This barrier is not a mere perceptual construct; it is empirically grounded in discriminatory promotion patterns, exclusion from high-stakes networks, and gendered evaluations of competence. Social barriers further compound these limitations. Deep-seated cultural expectations reinforce patriarchal norms that dichotomize women's roles, making professional ambition appear deviant or incompatible with femininity. Organisational barriers are equally salient—manifesting in opaque hiring practices, gender-insensitive policies, and the absence of institutional mentorship structures. These systemic constraints function synergistically, reinforcing one another and creating a hostile ecosystem that stifles women's leadership potential. In the context of Technical Universities, dismantling these interlocking barriers requires transformative policy reforms, gender audits, and inclusive leadership frameworks that challenge institutional inertia.

The framework identifies strategic levers that can be mobilized to accelerate women's leadership progression within Technical Universities. Foremost among these are targeted *career development opportunities*, which equip women with technical and managerial competencies essential for leadership roles. These interventions transcend

training; they are empowerment mechanisms that recalibrate confidence and challenge internalized inferiority. *Mentorship and role modeling* serve as pivotal relational assets, enabling women to access experiential knowledge, navigate institutional politics, and envision leadership possibilities. Equally critical is *social networking*, which functions as a conduit for resource mobilization, collaboration, and visibility in male-dominated academic landscapes. Lastly, *emotional support systems* from professional peers to family units serve as psychosocial buffers that mitigate stress and enhance resilience. Collectively, these enablers present a transformative paradigm, challenging deficit-based narratives and underscoring the importance of structural facilitation. For Technical Universities, institutionalizing these strategies is not optional but imperative for fostering inclusive and sustainable leadership pipelines.



The comprehensive framework (as depicted in figure 1) paints a vivid picture of the multifaceted nature of the influencing factors, barriers and challenges faced by women in leadership positions in Ghanaian Technical Universities. It underscores the urgent need for proactive measures, policy changes, and cultural shifts to dismantle these barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable environment. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is not just a matter of gender equality; it is also a crucial step toward harnessing the full potential and talent of all individuals, regardless of gender, to advance the academic excellence and innovation that these Technical Universities aspire to achieve. Also, the conceptual framework encapsulated multifaceted opportunities that can empower women in Technical Universities to break through barriers and advance their careers. It highlights the significance of a holistic support system that includes career advancement, mentoring, professional networking, and emotional support. By recognizing and harnessing these

opportunities, women in Technical Universities can not only overcome the obstacles they may encounter but also thrive as leaders, contributing significantly to the growth and development of these institutions.

## **2.6. Chapter Summary**

The second chapter of the study served as the critical foundation for the research delving into a comprehensive review of scholarly perspectives and findings that bear relevance to this study. This chapter was organized into distinct sections, each with its specific focus, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the subject matter. The theoretical review section explores various theoretical frameworks such as; glass ceiling theory, role congruity theory, as well as gender role theory. The conceptual review section provided an in-depth examination of key concepts and constructs central to our study. This conceptual exploration lays the groundwork for a robust understanding of the factors and concepts at play in this research. The empirical review section was dedicated to a meticulous analysis of prior empirical studies and research findings relevant to the study. The researcher scrutinized existing research conducted within and beyond the Ghanaian context, focusing on studies that shed light on the career trajectories of women in the world of work. This empirical review not only informed the current research but also provides a benchmark against which the researcher can compare the inescapable findings that will emerge. The last segment of the framework is the development of the conceptual framework, which synthesized the insights gained from the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical reviews. This framework served as a guiding structure for the research, outlining the key concepts in the study.

The subsequent chapter of this comprehensive study is the research methodology. This pivotal chapter serves as the methodological backbone upon which the entire

research endeavor is constructed, providing a clear and systematic roadmap for how we approach data collection, analysis, and interpretation. It hinges on the methodological framework within which the researcher will navigate the uncharted terrain of women's career progression within Technical Universities in Ghana, setting the stage for the substantive findings and insights that will emerge in subsequent chapters.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the techniques and protocols used for investigating the patterns of women's career advancement and the obstacles impeding their progress are delineated. The Chapter encompasses various segments, including the researcher's philosophical standpoint, detailing the views on the nature of reality and sources of knowledge (ontological and epistemological stance), research approach, research design, population, sample and sampling technique, data collection instrument, trustworthiness of the instruments as well as data analysis plan.

#### 3.2. Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

According to Cohen et al. (2000), social reality can be perceived from multiple perspectives and constructed in diverse ways depending on the observer's worldview. Methodological choices, therefore, are not arbitrary; rather, they are fundamentally underpinned by philosophical and theoretical positions regarding the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and how it can be acquired, as well as assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology). Ontology, in particular, is concerned with the essence and structure of reality, specifically whether social phenomena exist independently of human cognition or are constructed through human experiences and interactions (Fleetwood, 2005; Rachmad, 2000). Ontological assumptions guide researchers in framing what they believe exists in the social world and what is worth investigating. Within social research, two dominant ontological positions are commonly articulated. The first is the realist ontological assumption which posits that social reality is external, objective, fixed, and independent of the researcher; reality exists 'out there' waiting to be discovered (Cohen et al., 2000). In other words, the realist school of

thought is grounded in the assumption that reality is measurable, and unaffected by human perception, thereby aligning with positivist paradigms and quantitative methodologies.

In contrast, the second is the nominalist or constructivist ontological position which holds that social reality is not external but socially constructed, subjectively experienced, and expressed through language and meaning-making processes (Sikes, 2004). This implies that, the nominalist school of thought posits that reality is fluid, interpretive, and dependent on human consciousness, thereby aligning with interpretive paradigms and qualitative approaches (Gray, 2004). This study, which sought to explore how women in the Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana have attained success in their professional careers and to identify the barriers that have impeded their career progression, is firmly grounded in the nominalist ontological perspective. This standpoint acknowledges that the experiences, interpretations, and meanings attributed by the women themselves are central to understanding their realities. Consequently, this ontological orientation informed the choice of methodology aimed at collecting rich, descriptive data through dialogue and interaction, in order to construct meaning and interpret lived experiences. Such a perspective enabled the study to generate context-sensitive insights by privileging participants' voices and co-constructing knowledge in the socio-cultural context in which these women operate. The nominalist ontological position underpinning the study informs the epistemological perspectives that guide the entire research process.

Epistemology constitutes the philosophical inquiry into the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge, addressing the questions of what knowledge is, how it is acquired, and how it can be validated (Sikes, 2004; Gray, 2004). In social research, epistemological

assumptions inform the researcher's stance on the relationship between the knower and what is known, shaping the approach to data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Gray (2004) identifies three dominant epistemological positions: objectionist, subjectivist, and constructivist. The objectionist epistemology assumes that reality exists independently of the observer and can be objectively discovered through scientific methods. This stance aligns with the realist ontological tradition, supporting positivist paradigms and quantitative methods that seek generalizable truths. The subjectivist epistemology, while recognizing that individuals have the capacity to construct knowledge, contends that meanings are imposed on them by external objects. This position straddles a middle ground and is often critiqued for lacking clarity in its alignment, but it leans more toward the realist tradition, emphasizing an external influence on internal cognition. In contrast, constructivist epistemology posits that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals rather than discovered; meaning is not inherent in phenomena but is created through human interaction and interpretation. This view aligns strongly with the nominalist ontological position, underpinning interpretive and qualitative research traditions.

Based on these epistemological positions, the constructivist epistemology forms the core epistemological foundation of the current study, which aimed to explore how women in Technical Universities in Ghana have achieved professional success and the barriers that hinder their career progression. This epistemological stance privileges participants' subjective experiences and contextual interpretations, acknowledging that knowledge is not discovered but co-constructed through dialogue and social engagement. The researcher does not stand apart from the researched but becomes an active participant in meaning-making. This epistemological standpoint is inextricably linked to the nominalist ontological position, as both reject the notion of a fixed,

external reality in favour of socially and culturally mediated constructions of knowledge. It provided a coherent philosophical foundation that shaped the research paradigm guiding the study.

In complementing the ontological and epistemological assumptions outlined, it is imperative to advance the axiological foundations of this study, as axiology—concerning the role of values in research—constitutes a pivotal philosophical dimension in qualitative inquiry. In interpretivist traditions, values are not extraneous elements to be bracketed out, but integral to the research process, shaping both the inquiry and its outcomes (Lincoln et al., 2011). Unlike positivist paradigms that promote value-neutrality and detachment, the axiological assumptions underpinning qualitative research affirm that inquiry is inherently value-laden and reflexive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). A failure to acknowledge this would render the research epistemologically incoherent and ontologically naïve, undermining the interpretive integrity that defines rigorous qualitative inquiry within this study, which interrogated the lived experiences of women navigating career trajectories within Ghanaian Technical Universities, the researcher's values—particularly a commitment to social justice, equity, and the amplification of marginalized voices—were not only present but constitutive of the entire research endeavour. These axiological commitments influenced the selection of participants, the framing of interview questions, and the interpretive lens through which findings were understood.

Furthermore, the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants was guided by an ethic of care, respect, and empathetic engagement, reflecting the centrality of relational values in interpretivist research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As such, rather than compromising the objectivity of the research,

these value commitments enhanced its authenticity, trustworthiness, and ethical rigour. The axiology of the study also influenced the nature of truth claims advanced, rejecting universal generalizations in favour of situated, contextualised, and nuanced understandings. As Patton (2015) contends, qualitative research is concerned not with statistical generalizability but with analytical and theoretical transferability, grounded in the authenticity of the researcher-participant encounter. Hence, axiology intersects with both ontology and epistemology in shaping how knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and justified. The researcher's presence as an instrument of inquiry, imbued with personal and professional values, facilitated deep empathetic listening and critically engaged interpretation—both of which were essential in uncovering the socio-cultural complexities surrounding women's career progression.

### **3.3. Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm is a coherent framework that encompasses a set of beliefs and assumptions about the world, guiding researchers in selecting appropriate methodologies and methods (Creswell, 2014). Paradigms shape how researchers conceptualize their studies, define problems, and interpret findings. The three most commonly discussed paradigms in social research are positivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. Each represents a distinct philosophical worldview with differing ontological and epistemological assumptions.

The positivist paradigm is rooted in the natural sciences and upholds the belief in a single, objective reality that can be empirically observed and measured. It aligns with an objectionist epistemology and is primarily associated with quantitative methods. Positivist studies often aim for generalizability, replicability, and prediction. However, such an approach is ill-suited to contexts involving human behaviour and social interactions, which are inherently subjective and complex (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). In the current study, which sought to understand the career progression of women in Ghanaian Technical Universities, positivist assumptions proved inadequate. The lived experiences, cultural contexts, and institutional dynamics influencing women's careers cannot be captured through detached observation or quantifiable metrics. Thus, the positivist paradigm fails to accommodate the richness and diversity of the participants' perspectives and is therefore deemed inappropriate for this inquiry.

The pragmatic paradigm, on the other hand, adopts a flexible, problem-centered approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to find practical solutions (Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism values both objective and subjective knowledge, focusing on what works in specific contexts. While this paradigm offers methodological versatility, it lacks a deep philosophical commitment to the social construction of reality, which is essential for this study (Creswell, 2014). The pragmatic emphasis on utility over understanding does not sufficiently align with the overarching aim of the current study which explored the subjective experiences of women and the systemic barriers they face in career progression. As such, pragmatism, while useful in applied research, is not the most fitting paradigm for this inquiry. The purpose of the present study situates it within the interpretive paradigm, as elaborated in the subsequent section.

### **3.3.1. Interpretive Research Paradigm**

The interpretive paradigm is grounded in the belief that reality is constructed through human interaction and is best understood through the meanings that individuals assign to their experiences (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Unlike positivism, which seeks to explain phenomena through objective observation, interpretivism seeks to understand the "how" and "why" behind human behaviour (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2018).

Historically, the interpretive paradigm evolved as a response to the limitations of positivist approaches in the social sciences (Willis et al., 2007). It is based on constructivist epistemology, which posits that knowledge emerges from social processes, cultural contexts, and individual consciousness. This paradigm recognizes that researchers are part of the social world they study, and that their interactions with participants shape the knowledge produced. This paradigm also privileges subjectivity and contextuality, acknowledging that human actions are guided by internal meanings and social constructs, not merely external forces. Interpretivists argue that meaning is central to understanding human behaviour. Polit and Berk (2018) emphasised that reality is not an independent entity waiting to be discovered but is instead interpreted through the lens of human experience. This paradigm incorporates perspectives such as phenomenology, which examines lived experiences, and hermeneutics, which focuses on interpreting textual and social meanings. It also incorporates social constructivism, emphasizing how knowledge is co-produced through social interaction. Saunders et al. (2012) support the view that researchers must immerse themselves in the social contexts of participants to fully comprehend their perspectives.

In the context of this study, the interpretivist paradigm serves as the most appropriate philosophical foundation due to its emphasis on understanding the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences. This study aims to explore how women in Ghanaian Technical Universities interpret their professional journeys, challenges, and accomplishments, not to quantify outcomes or establish causal relationships. Interpretivism, as Creswell and Poth (2018) argue, is rooted in the belief that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the meanings individuals attach to their lived experiences. Drawing from the foundational work of

Corbin and Strauss (2015), who emphasize the value of qualitative inquiry in uncovering nuanced, grounded insights, this study adopts a methodological stance that allows women's voices to emerge authentically. Through in-depth interviews, the research sought to grasp how institutional structures, gender norms, and individual agency interact in shaping women's career trajectories. Such an approach aligns with Creswell (2014), who asserts that qualitative methods guided by interpretivism are ideal for investigating complex social phenomena where multiple realities coexist. Furthermore, Creswell (2016) highlights that interpretive inquiry enables researchers to explore the *how* and *why* behind participants' actions and decisions, a perspective central to understanding the contextual barriers and facilitators influencing women's career progression.

The paradigm's focus on co-constructing meaning with participants also resonates with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) advocacy for research that gives voice to marginalized or underrepresented groups, such as women in male-dominated academic leadership structures. By acknowledging the diversity of experiences and the contextual specificities of each participant, the interpretivist paradigm provided the appropriate lens through which this study accessed and articulated the multifaceted and socially situated realities of women leaders. This depth of understanding is critical for informing policies and institutional practices aimed at advancing gender equity in leadership within Ghanaian Technical Universities.

### **3.4. Research Approach**

According to Creswell (2014), there are three main research approaches available to studies in the Humanities and the Social Sciences: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Each of these approaches serves specific research purposes, with quantitative methods focusing on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative

methods emphasizing depth and meaning, and mixed methods integrating both to provide comprehensive insights. However, given the interpretivist paradigm underpinning this study, the qualitative research approach was deemed the most suitable.

The interpretivist paradigm recognizes the socially constructed nature of reality and seeks to understand the meanings individuals attach to their experiences. Aligned with this worldview, the qualitative research approach offers an avenue to explore the complex, subjective experiences of participants. Qualitative research is defined as a multifaceted methodology that delves into the depth of social phenomena, focusing on the intricate meanings embedded within human actions and experiences (Creswell, 2014; Bailey, 2015). It extends beyond surface-level observation, aiming to uncover the emotional and cognitive dimensions that shape individual and collective behaviour. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), qualitative research offers a powerful lens for understanding the lived realities of individuals who are intimately connected to the research problem. Similarly, Mohajan (2018) underscores the value of qualitative research in uncovering the hidden threads that connect individual behaviours to broader social realities. It is within this interplay between the visible and the invisible that qualitative inquiry reveals the subtle messages and implicit norms embedded in human narratives. Shank and Brown (2007) echo this view, asserting that qualitative research seeks to interpret the varied ways individuals construct meaning from their encounters and environments.

Despite its strengths, Christensen and Johnson (2012) argued that qualitative researchers perceive the social world as fluid and context-bound, which often limits the generalizability of findings. Moreover, replicability is frequently questioned, as

constructivist researchers may not follow standardized procedures akin to those used in scientific experimentation (Cohen, 2011). Cohen suggests that qualitative researchers often rely on narrative construction due to their inability to validate findings through empirical verification. This dependence on subjective accounts may result in inconsistencies or biases, as noted by Atkins and Wallace (2012), who questioned the dependability of qualitative data when compared to objective metrics. Additionally, Cohen and Morrison (2011) warn that the subjective techniques employed may introduce inaccuracies or misinterpretations. Leedy and Ormrod (2014) and De Vaus (2014) further caution that the multidimensionality of the social world renders qualitative findings difficult to replicate across different settings and researchers.

Nevertheless, in spite of these challenges, the qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate for this study. The decision was grounded in the need to explore and interpret the lived experiences, perceptions, and narratives of women in leadership positions in Ghana's Technical Universities. As Collis and Hussey (2003) argue, qualitative research is particularly suitable when the objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of a research subject without imposing rigid constraints on participants' responses.

This study aimed to illuminate the multidimensional pathways of women's career progression, the barriers they face, and the enabling factors within the academic environment. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to capture the rich, nuanced, and deeply personal insights of participants, allowing their voices and experiences to inform the research findings. As Cohen et al. (2000) suggested, qualitative research penetrates beyond the superficial to uncover underlying

motivations and socio-cultural dynamics. With tools such as in-depth interviews, the researcher becomes an interpreter of meaning, translating subjective experiences into meaningful academic insights. This approach enabled the researcher to access a wealth of verbal data through audio recordings and subsequent thematic analysis, producing rich and insightful findings on the career progression of women in Ghana's Technical Universities.

### **3.5. Research Design**

A research design serves as the foundational blueprint that guides the entire process of a research project. As Kothari (2004) aptly noted, it is the bedrock upon which the entire structure of research activities is built. In support of this, Bryman (2016) described research design as a detailed framework that shapes the procedures for data collection and analysis. These views highlight the critical function of research design in organizing, directing, and coordinating the complex processes involved in empirical investigation. The selection of a research design must therefore align with the nature of the research problem, its objectives, guiding questions, and the targeted sample. In the context of this study, which explored the lived experiences of Ghanaian women in leadership positions within Technical Universities, a hermeneutic phenomenological research design was adopted. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to uncover the meaning of lived experiences through interpretive understanding, rather than mere description (Creswell & Crewell, 2018). It recognizes that experiences are not simply "given" but are interpreted through language, culture, history, and social context. As Laverty (2003) emphasized, hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges the researcher's role in meaning-making and embraces the fusion of horizons between researcher and participant (Dangal & Joshi, 2020).

This design was most appropriate for this study, which aimed to understand the barriers to career progression faced by women in leadership within Ghana's Technical Universities. The complexities of gendered leadership, institutional dynamics, and cultural expectations cannot be fully understood through detached observation; rather, they must be interpreted through the participants' reflective accounts. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the emphasis is not solely on "what" participants experience, but on how they make sense of their experiences, particularly as these experiences are situated in larger socio-cultural and historical structures (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). This approach enabled the researcher to engage deeply with participants' narratives, recognizing that their leadership journeys are embedded in a web of meanings shaped by institutional cultures, family roles, gender norms, and historical conditions. For example, Organisational barriers such as gender stereotyping, policy inconsistencies, and patriarchal norms were interpreted not only as structural impediments but as meaning-laden encounters that women leaders must constantly negotiate.

Hermeneutic phenomenology provided the methodological tools to explore how these women interpret, resist, or accommodate these barriers as part of their leadership identity and career trajectory. The theoretical framing of the study—drawing from Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), Glass Ceiling Theory (Cotter et al., 2001), and Gender Role Theory (Bem, 1983) further supports the hermeneutic orientation. These theories highlight the role of social perception, identity construction, and institutionalized discourse in shaping women's leadership experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology allows participants' voices to challenge, reaffirm, or reconstruct these dominant narratives by revealing the personal meanings attributed to their struggles and successes.

Methodologically, the study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to facilitate reflective engagement with past and present leadership experiences. Participants were invited to speak openly about significant moments, challenges, turning points, and institutional dynamics that shaped their professional lives. The interviews were not strictly chronological but allowed for deep reflection and interpretive dialogue, consistent with hermeneutic traditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data analysis followed a hermeneutic circle approach, in which understanding emerged through a continuous movement between parts of the text and the whole, between the researcher's fore-meanings and the participants' expressions. Themes were identified not merely as recurrent ideas, but as structures of meaning that revealed how women construct and reconstruct their experiences within the cultural, institutional, and gendered contexts of their work.

Ultimately, the hermeneutic phenomenological design provided a rigorous and context-sensitive means of exploring the lived realities of Ghanaian women in academic leadership. It moved beyond surface-level accounts of gender inequality to reveal the depth of personal meaning, emotional resonance, and interpretive agency that characterize women's career progression in male-dominated institutional spaces. By engaging in a process of dialogic interpretation, the study illuminated how these leaders understand themselves, their roles, and the challenges they face not as isolated events, but as meaningful experiences situated within broader social and historical horizons.

### 3.6. Case Selection

In Ghana, the technical universities are zoned based on their geographical jurisdictions: the Northern Zone, Southern Zone, Western Zone, and Eastern Zone. While an ideal study would have included institutions from all four zones, practical limitations related to time and financial resources necessitated a strategic and focused approach. Rather than diluting the depth of the research through an overly expansive “elephant-size” study, a deliberate decision was made to conduct a rigorous, “bite-size” investigation focused on the Southern Zone. This zone was selected not as a matter of convenience but as a strategic choice rooted in methodological justification. The Southern Zone encapsulates a representative spectrum of Ghana’s technical university system—it reflects shared structural, administrative, and educational patterns found across the country’s technical universities, including similarities in curriculum design, public-private affiliations, and governance frameworks. Therefore, the selection of the Southern Zone is methodologically defensible and ensures that the findings are both contextually grounded and reasonably generalizable.

More importantly, the selection of the Southern Zone aligns with Denscombe’s (2003) justification for case selection. Among the four criteria proposed extreme instance, theory-building, theory-testing, and typical instance the Southern Zone qualifies as a “typical instance.” This means it mirrors essential characteristics of technical universities across other zones in Ghana, enabling the study to capture insights that are not idiosyncratic but emblematic of broader national patterns. Denscombe (2003) further asserted that a typical case is most often chosen because “the particular case is similar in crucial respects with others that might have been chosen,” thereby enhancing the external relevance of the findings. Additionally, by focusing on female

leaders within this zone, the study targets a strategically relevant yet under-researched subset of higher education leadership in Ghana.

### **3.7 Population**

According to Creswell (2017), a population is defined as a collective of individuals who share common characteristics and represent the comprehensive subject of investigation within research. Essentially, the population served as the specific group from which a researcher sought to gather pertinent information to formulate conclusive insights (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Within this broader group, the accessible population refers to the specific portion of the population that is practically available and eligible for participation in a given study (Etikan & Bala, 2017). This subset is crucial because researchers often face logistical, geographical, or institutional constraints that prevent them from reaching the entire target population. In this study, the population encompassed all women occupying senior positions within the top echelons of management across the ten technical universities in the country. However, the accessible population was limited to women holding leadership positions in technical universities located in the southern part of Ghana. These leadership positions comprised key officers, principal members of management, as well as Deans presiding over various faculties. The cohort of key officers included the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor, Registrar, and Director of Finance.

The management team, in turn, consisted of the Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Director of Finance, Internal Auditor, and Director of Works and Physical Development. All women who held positions within this management structure, whether as key officers, management members, or faculty Deans, were considered qualified and eligible participants for the study. Their inclusion enabled the research to critically examine the gender dynamics within leadership roles, ensuring that the

perspectives gathered reflected both the breadth and depth of female representation in the governance of Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.

**Table 1: Breakdown of accessible population**

Target Population	Chanc	VC	Pro-VC	Registrar	Dir. of Fin	Int. Auditor	Dir. of Works	Deans	Total
TTU	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
ATU	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2
HTU	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	2
CCTU	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	2
KTU	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
KsTU	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>

Source: Author's own construct (2024).

From Table 1, it could be observed that the population of the study consisted of 12 participants. These participants represent all female leaders from all the public technical universities in the Southern Zone of Ghana. The population consisted of 4 deans and the remaining 8 occupied positions in the management and key officers.

### 3.7.1. Inclusion Criteria

In this study, the inclusion criteria were designed to ensure the selection of participants whose experiences and insights would directly inform the research focus on women in senior leadership roles within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. Specifically, participants were required to be women currently holding formal leadership positions within the upper echelons of institutional governance in public Technical Universities located in the southern zone of Ghana. Eligible roles included key officers, management members, as well as Registrars. These categories were purposively chosen because they represent strategic leadership roles with influence over institutional policy, academic programming, and administrative governance.

A second inclusion criterion required that participants possess a minimum of 15 years of professional experience within academia or university administration. This threshold ensured the participants had extensive career trajectories, providing a historical and reflective depth to the study's phenomenological inquiry. Additionally, only individuals with advanced academic qualifications, specifically MPhil or PhD, were included, reinforcing the scholarly credibility and professional legitimacy of their perspectives.

Furthermore, all participants were required to be currently serving in leadership roles at the time of the study to guarantee the recency and immediacy of their experiences. Their contemporaneous engagement with institutional structures, decision-making processes, and gendered dynamics was essential for generating authentic and situated accounts of leadership in technical higher education.

In line with the hermeneutic phenomenological framework of the study, which values the co-construction of meaning through lived experience, these inclusion criteria were carefully crafted to select information-rich participants capable of articulating the nuances, challenges, and transformations characterizing women's leadership journeys. Their eligibility ensured relevance, contextual resonance, and experiential depth—all critical for generating phenomenologically grounded insights.

### **3.7.2. Exclusion Criteria**

To safeguard the analytical integrity and methodological coherence of the study, several exclusion criteria were applied. First, any female academic or administrative staff who did not currently occupy a leadership position within the governance or management structure of a public Technical University was excluded from participation. This included mid-level managers, junior administrators, and lecturers

without executive responsibilities. While such individuals may have valuable perspectives, their experiential vantage point does not align with the study's core objective of understanding the lived realities of senior female leadership within Ghana's Technical Universities.

Second, women working in private technical or tertiary institutions were excluded, even if they held senior leadership roles. The rationale for this exclusion lies in the distinct institutional frameworks, governance mandates, and accountability structures that differentiate public from private universities. Including participants from private institutions could have introduced contextual variability that would dilute the interpretive clarity of the findings within the public sector milieu.

Third, individuals with less than 15 years of cumulative professional experience in higher education were excluded. This criterion was grounded in the need for participants with substantial exposure to the evolving gender dynamics, leadership cultures, and institutional transformations within Ghanaian academia. Those with limited experience might lack the longitudinal insight necessary for the depth of reflection required in a phenomenological study.

Lastly, individuals who had previously held but no longer occupied leadership roles were excluded. Retrospective accounts, while potentially valuable, carry the risk of memory distortion, selective recall, or detachment from present institutional realities. To ensure that the findings reflected current institutional dynamics and lived experiences, the study only included those actively navigating leadership challenges at the time of data collection.

By applying these exclusion criteria, the study preserved its focus on contemporary, context-specific, and experientially grounded narratives, thereby ensuring the

thematic authenticity, interpretive depth, and empirical rigour of its qualitative findings.

### **3.8. Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

In qualitative phenomenological research, the emphasis is not on statistical representativeness but on eliciting deep, contextually grounded insights into the lived experiences of individuals who are intimately acquainted with the phenomenon under investigation. In this context, the study recruited a sample size of twelve participants. According to Creswell (2014), phenomenological inquiries typically involve 5 to 25 participants, enabling rich, in-depth engagement and iterative analysis of subjective experiences. The selected sample size thus falls squarely within established qualitative norms and is further justified by the principle of data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge from additional data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This study's focus on the career trajectories, barriers, and enabling factors affecting women in senior leadership within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana necessitates a sample that allows for prolonged interaction and interpretive depth, which smaller sample sizes facilitate.

Furthermore, the size allows for a robust cross-case analysis while maintaining manageable data volumes for phenomenological explication, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). The participants, all of whom hold substantial institutional leadership roles, possess the experiential authority to speak to the nuanced interplay of gender, power, and institutional culture. Their perspectives are not incidental but essential, aligning with criterion-based inclusion commonly advocated in phenomenological research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Thus, the sample size of

twelve not only adheres to qualitative standards but enhances the analytic richness, internal coherence, and practical relevance of the study's findings.

The study employed maximum variation sampling, a purposive strategy designed to capture a wide array of perspectives within a specific phenomenon. In this technique, all the names of the women in higher positions in the selected technical university were collected, and their positions were considered. To obtain the maximum variation, if the positions held by the women are the same at one university, only one will be selected. For example, at a university, it was found that two women held the same position, namely dean. Only one was selected. The other samples were selected based on their differences from the others.

This sampling technique is particularly appropriate within a transcendental phenomenological framework, where the goal is to uncover both the universal essences and the context-specific variations in lived experiences (Glesne, 2015). Maximum variation sampling allows the researcher to purposefully select participants who vary across dimensions such as institutional affiliation, academic discipline, and leadership trajectory, thereby enhancing the transferability and robustness of the findings. By selecting twelve female leaders from diverse Technical Universities across Ghana, the study ensured that participants represented a heterogeneous yet thematically coherent group. This methodological choice was informed by the recognition that women's experiences in academic leadership are shaped by intersecting factors, such as institutional culture, social expectations, and structural constraints, which require a sampling approach that captures both convergence and divergence (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The technique aligns with interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) principles, which prioritize the co-construction of

meaning through detailed accounts from diverse informants (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, the selection of participants based on information-rich criteria ensures that the data collected are deeply reflective and analytically valuable. Maximum variation sampling, therefore, not only supports theoretical saturation but also enhances the study's credibility and dependability (Patton, 2015). Given the study's aim to illuminate barriers and enablers in women's leadership journeys, this approach was indispensable for constructing a multi-dimensional understanding that extends beyond individual narratives to broader institutional and societal implications.

### **3.9 Instruments for Data Collection**

In alignment with the hermeneutic phenomenological orientation of this study, the primary instrument employed for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide and a Focus Group Discussion.

#### **3.9.1. Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

The semi-structured interview guide was developed based on an extensive review of relevant literature, conceptual frameworks, and philosophical assumptions that underpin interpretive phenomenology. The construction process was rigorous, involving expert consultations, peer review, and iterative refinement to ensure the instrument's clarity, contextual relevance, and alignment with the research questions. The interview guide was systematically structured into seven thematic sections, each focusing on a specific aspect of the participants' career experiences. The first section, which covered demographic information, gathered basic yet vital data on the participants' age, educational qualifications, and years of service within the education sector. This provided a foundation for contextualizing their narratives.

The second section explored career progression trends and was adapted from Eagly and Carli's (2007) labyrinth model, which details the complex pathways women

navigate in leadership roles. This section was customized to capture participants' individual career trajectories, motivations for pursuing leadership, and the institutional mechanisms that facilitated their advancement. Emphasis was placed on understanding how these journeys unfolded within the unique environment of Ghanaian Technical Universities. The third section examined internal and external facilitators of career advancement. Drawing from Wellington's (2003) Women's Career Development Framework, this section was modified to reflect the Ghanaian context. For example, emphasis was placed on localized forms of support such as mentorship from senior female academics, community encouragement, and institution-specific gender initiatives. These contextual modifications allowed for a richer understanding of the enabling factors that contribute to women's leadership development. Challenges encountered by participants formed the focus of the fourth section. This section was adapted from the works of Morley (2013) and O'Neil et al. (2008), who discuss systemic barriers to women's leadership globally. However, modifications were made to highlight localized socio-cultural and institutional challenges, including patriarchal Organisational cultures, limited access to leadership development opportunities, and prevailing gender stereotypes in academia.

The fifth section of the interview guide addressed opportunities for career advancement and was inspired by themes from the African Women in Leadership Programme as well as various gender equity studies. The original emphasis on institutional opportunities was expanded to include Ghana-specific elements such as scholarship schemes, study leave with pay, mentorship and networking, and targeted capacity-building programmes designed to empower women within higher education. The sixth section delved into the barriers that persist even after women attain leadership positions. This section was adapted from Ely and Meyerson's (2000)

model of subtle gender bias in Organisations. It was modified to reflect post-appointment experiences in the Ghanaian academic context, such as increased workloads, resistance from subordinates, and symbolic representation that often limits the substantive participation of women in decision-making processes.

The last section focused on institutional strategies and recommendations for enhancing gender equity. This section drew on global frameworks such as UNESCO's gender policy guidelines and Ghana's National Gender Policy (2015). It was reformulated to solicit participants' views on the effectiveness of institutional policies and gender equity structures within Technical Universities, as well as their recommendations for improvement. Consistent with Cleary et al. (2014), the selection of this instrument was not incidental but stemmed from a strategic rationale: the need to collect rich, nuanced, and in-depth data capable of addressing the multifaceted research questions. The semi-structured interview guide facilitated a dynamic and interactive data collection process. It allowed for the emergence of participant narratives while ensuring alignment with pre-defined thematic concerns central to the study.

Participants were encouraged to recount formative experiences, describe institutional encounters, and articulate the subjective interpretations of their leadership journeys. The semi-structured format allowed for a balance between consistency across interviews and flexibility in exploring emerging themes. This design respected the phenomenological imperative to let participants lead the narrative while enabling the researcher to ensure thematic coverage. The interview setting was conversational, fostering rapport and trust, which are essential for accessing lived experiences that are often layered with personal, socio-cultural, and institutional meanings.

All interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format. Each session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and preserve narrative integrity. Member checking was employed post-interview to verify the authenticity of transcriptions and enhance the credibility of the study. The interviews served as the cornerstone of the data collection process, enabling the researcher to explore not just what participants experienced but how they made sense of those experiences within the broader context of gendered leadership in technical higher education. Through reflective dialogue, the interviews captured a tapestry of meanings, struggles, breakthroughs, and institutional negotiations, crucial to understanding the essence of women's career progression in Ghanaian Technical Universities.

### **3.9.2. Focus Group Discussion**

To complement and triangulate the data obtained through individual interviews, two separate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted. This approach was methodologically aligned with the dialogical and interpretive ethos of hermeneutic phenomenology, which emphasizes the co-construction of meaning through communal reflection and intersubjective engagement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The FGDs offered an enabling context in which participants, female leaders in Ghanaian Technical Universities, could collectively negotiate, refine, and expand upon the insights previously shared in one-on-one interviews.

Given the methodological and practical limitations associated with large-group FGDs, the twelve interviewees were strategically divided into two smaller focus groups, each comprising six participants. This segmentation ensured effective facilitation, mitigated the risk of conversational dominance, and allowed for richer, more nuanced contributions from each participant. The groupings were informed by participants'

institutional affiliations and administrative contexts, allowing for thematic coherence and comparability across discussions.

All FGDs were conducted via an online phone conferencing platform, selected for its accessibility and practicality in light of participants' geographically dispersed locations and the time-sensitive demands of their leadership roles. Each session lasted approximately 40 -60 minutes and was audio-recorded with informed consent. Field notes were concurrently taken to document relevant non-verbal cues and group dynamics that would later inform contextual interpretation during analysis.

The discussion guide was organized around five key thematic domains: (1) collective reflections on gendered leadership identity; (2) shared trajectories of career progression; (3) institutional enablers and systemic barriers; (4) experiences of post-attainment support structures; and (5) participant-informed policy recommendations to enhance gender equity in leadership. These themes were directly informed by the study's overarching research questions and preliminary codes emerging from individual interviews, thereby enabling deeper interrogation of recurring and emergent patterns.

Each FGD was moderated by the researcher, who adopted a neutral facilitation stance, employing open-ended questioning, reflective prompting, and turn-taking protocols to foster inclusive participation and psychological safety. The facilitation process adhered to rigorous qualitative standards, ensuring that diverse voices were elicited without marginalization or coercion (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Participants actively engaged in collective meaning-making, offering both consonant and divergent viewpoints that served to deepen the interpretive richness of the dataset.

Notably, the FGDs surfaced several novel insights that were either underexplored or absent in the individual interviews. These included nuanced reflections on informal mentorship among women leaders, the strategic formation of silent alliances, and adaptive strategies for navigating institutional patriarchy. The dialogical nature of the FGDs fostered hermeneutic amplification, whereby meaning was expanded through iterative, reflective dialogue. Transcriptions were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis with particular attention to intra-group consensus and interpretive divergence, thereby yielding a multilayered understanding of women's leadership experiences within the Ghanaian technical higher education landscape.

### **3.10. Piloting of the Instruments**

Piloting is a crucial preparatory phase in this qualitative study, aimed at evaluating the clarity, contextual relevance, and effectiveness of the semi-structured interview guide before its use in the main data collection. A purposive sample of three female staff members from Sunyani Technical University, each holding leadership and administrative roles, was selected for the pilot. This sample was chosen due to its alignment with the study population and the accessibility of participants who met the inclusion criteria.

The pilot process unfolded in three phases: instrument review, mock interviews, and debriefing. In the first phase, participants reviewed the draft interview guide and assessed each question for clarity, relevance, and ability to prompt deep reflection. Their feedback informed initial revisions to language, structure, and thematic focus. In the second phase, simulated interviews were conducted to observe how the questions performed in real-time and to identify practical challenges such as question sequencing and participant understanding.

Several challenges were encountered during piloting. These included ambiguous wording, repetitive questions, and an overly lengthy format that risked participant fatigue. To address these, the third phase debriefing was used to gather participants' reflections on their experience. Based on their input, unclear prompts were reworded, redundant questions were merged or eliminated, and the flow of the guide was refined for better coherence.

Additionally, a pilot focus group discussion was conducted with the three participants who were used for preliminary piloting of the instruments. The purpose was to assess the clarity, flow, and relevance of the discussion prompts and to ensure the setting encouraged open and meaningful dialogue. During the session, participants identified areas where questions overlapped, lacked focus, or required rewording for better understanding. Additionally, logistical aspects such as group dynamics, time management, and participant engagement were evaluated. Feedback gathered from the pilot informed critical adjustments to the discussion guide, including the simplification of complex prompts, improved sequencing of topics, and creation of a more inclusive and conversational tone. The process enhanced the overall effectiveness of the focus group method in generating rich, context-specific insights for the main study.

### **3.11. Data Collection Procedure**

Before initiating data collection, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Head of Department, Educational Administration and Management, University of Education, Winneba. This letter formally endorsed the study, stated its purpose, and affirmed the researcher's affiliation. It was presented to the management teams of selected Technical Universities to request permission for the research. Their approval signified institutional consent and cooperation. The letter also served to establish

professional rapport and credibility with institutional leaders. Upon receiving approval, the researcher met with potential participants to explain the study's objectives, purpose, and anticipated outcomes. These interactions were essential in ensuring participants fully understood the study and the value of their contributions. They also provided an opportunity to build trust and rapport, fostering a comfortable environment for open dialogue. Establishing this foundation was critical in encouraging participants to share candid insights, thereby enhancing the richness and quality of the data collected.

Participants were thoroughly briefed on the study's purpose, after which they received a consent form detailing the objectives, nature of participation, potential risks and benefits, and confidentiality measures. Adequate time was given for review and questions before participants voluntarily signed, affirming informed consent. The study focuses on exploring the career journeys of women in Technical Universities, examining both the enablers of their success and the barriers to advancement. Using a semi-structured interview and focus group discussion, the researcher captured diverse, in-depth perspectives. Participants were encouraged to expand on their responses, fostering a rich, flexible dialogue. Inspired by Ryan et al. (2009), the interviews and focus group adopted an informal, conversational tone to create a comfortable environment, enabling participants to share personal and often sensitive experiences freely. This approach built trust and rapport, which proved essential in eliciting authentic narratives. These insights are crucial for understanding the lived experiences of women in leadership within Technical Universities.

The duration of each interview and the focus group sessions, which lasted between 40 to 60 minutes, reflected careful consideration of participants' time and energy. This balance proved essential in gathering rich, meaningful data without overburdening the

respondents. The allotted time allowed for in-depth discussions while minimizing fatigue, thus preserving the quality of the information collected. It also demonstrated respect for participants' schedules and commitments. During the interviews and the focus group discussions, the researcher used a phone-based recording application to capture the discussions. This method proved instrumental in preserving the accuracy and integrity of the data. It safeguarded against the loss of critical insights and ensured that analysis could be conducted based on a reliable and complete audio record. The recordings also allowed for repeated review, aiding in the extraction of relevant and detailed information during the analysis phase. All the audio recordings (from the interviews and focus group) were transcribed verbatim to ensure the retention of linguistic nuances and contextual meaning. The resulting transcripts served as the primary data for analysis.

As the interviews progressed, recurring patterns and themes became evident across participants' narratives, particularly in relation to barriers to leadership progression, institutional cultures, mentorship opportunities, and work–life balance challenges. By the time the final participants were interviewed, the data began to exhibit redundancy, with no substantially new themes emerging. At this stage, additional interviews were yielding similar responses and reinforcing already established thematic categories. This indicated that data saturation had been reached.

Furthermore, the use of maximum variation sampling helped ensure that participants represented diverse leadership roles and experiences within Technical Universities. This diversity allowed the researcher to capture a wide range of perspectives before saturation was achieved. The decision to conclude data collection was therefore based on the observation that further interviews were no longer generating new information

relevant to the research objectives, indicating that the dataset was sufficiently rich and comprehensive to support the study's analysis and conclusions.

### **3.12. Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are traditionally executed in an iterative and simultaneous process (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The purpose of qualitative data analysis was to address the study's research questions by producing coherent interpretations of participants' narratives and observed phenomena. The study adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, offering a rigorous and flexible approach suited for unpacking the complex, lived experiences of women in leadership positions within Ghanaian Technical Universities. This framework guided the systematic process of data analysis: (1) familiarisation with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. This phased process allowed for reflexivity, thematic depth, and analytical precision, aligning well with the study's interpretive phenomenological orientation.

Following transcription and data familiarisation, coding was conducted in three distinct stages: open, axial, and selective using Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). This software was instrumental not only as a storage system but also as an analytical tool that supported the structured organisation and interpretation of unstructured textual data. In line with Yin (2009) recommendation for building a formal case study database, all interview transcripts, audio recordings, researcher memos, and observation notes were imported into the software and systematically coded using its hierarchical node structure.

Utilising the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), the coding process began with the creation of free nodes during open coding, capturing discrete ideas, phrases, and emerging concepts from the raw data. This stage was inductive in nature and aimed to remain grounded in the participants' language and viewpoints. As patterns and relationships emerged, these nodes were grouped into three nodes to represent categories and subcategories during the axial coding phase. This method allowed for the clustering of related codes into overarching themes. The rationale for employing open and axial coding stems from their efficacy in facilitating both data reduction and theoretical abstraction, critical steps in qualitative research seeking to move from descriptive accounts to conceptual interpretation. Selective coding was further enhanced by the software's visualization tools, such as mind maps, models, and hierarchy charts, which assisted in conceptualizing the core category around which all other themes were organized. This visual synthesis enabled the researcher to construct an integrative thematic model that reflected the complex interplay between institutional structures, gender dynamics, and leadership experiences. The researcher systematically revisited the coded data and thematic relationships established during open and axial coding to ensure coherence, consistency, and theoretical saturation. Selective coding facilitated the synthesis of subsidiary categories around the central theme, highlighting how diverse yet interconnected leadership experiences aligned with broader institutional, cultural, and gendered dynamics. The preliminary themes were reviewed against the original transcripts to confirm that they accurately reflected the participants' perspectives and were supported by sufficient evidence from the data. Peer debriefing with academic supervisors and experienced qualitative researchers helped refine the coding structure and strengthen the interpretation of the themes.

The use of Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) substantially enhanced the procedural efficiency, auditability, and consistency of data management, without comprising the interpretive agency fundamental to qualitative inquiry. The use of the software functioned as a methodological facilitator, supporting a reflexive and iterative analytic process in which emergent codes and thematic constructs were systematically interrogated, revisited, and refined. Its utility lay in augmenting the rigour of the analysis by enabling structured data interrogation, facilitating thematic traceability, and preserving the integrity of contextually embedded meanings. The epistemological core of the analysis remained grounded in the researcher's interpretive engagement with the data, consistent with the phenomenological orientation of the study.

### **3.13. Trustworthiness of the Instruments**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness encompasses the degree of confidence in the methods used to ensure the study's quality (Anney, 2014). The researcher's role is to establish protocols and procedures for readers to replicate the study (Amankwaa, 2016). The methods used for trustworthiness must fit the research design of the study. Trustworthiness is an essential aspect of a study that a researcher uses to reassure the readers that the research is significant and valuable (Miles et al., 2014). The criteria outlined for trustworthiness in a study included credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Patton, 2015). The procedure used to establish trustworthiness was a revised form of Lincoln & Guba's (1985) framework.

#### **3.13.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth and authenticity of the study's findings and the degree to which they accurately reflect participants' realities (Patton, 2015). To ensure credibility, the researcher adopted multiple strategies at different stages.

Initially, reflexivity was practiced by openly acknowledging potential biases and predispositions, which laid the foundation for honest inquiry. During data collection, prolonged engagement and persistent observation allowed for deep immersion in participants' contexts, fostering trust and capturing authentic perspectives. In later stages, credibility was further reinforced through peer review, data saturation, and member checking.

The document confirms that the researcher invested significant time with participants in their natural settings, allowing for deeper understanding and trust-building. Moreover, peer review ensured that methodological decisions and interpretations were subjected to expert scrutiny, enhancing methodological integrity (Miles et al., 2014). Data collection continued until no new themes emerged, satisfying the saturation requirement. Most notably, the researcher implemented member checking by sharing transcripts and findings with participants, inviting them to verify or challenge interpretations. This collaborative feedback mechanism, as outlined, strengthened the credibility of the interview guide by validating that it captured the participants lived experiences accurately (Patton, 2015).

### **3.13.2. Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other contexts with similar characteristics (Miles et al., 2014). Unlike statistical generalizability, transferability is achieved by providing enough contextual detail for readers to determine relevance to other settings. To ensure this, the researcher offered rich, thick descriptions of the research context, participant demographics, and cultural nuances. The study also used diverse participant selection and compared results with related studies to support broader applicability. The write-up affirms that the researcher vividly described the setting and participants, thereby

enabling readers to judge contextual similarity. Detailed, nuanced accounts of participants' experiences—supported by direct quotes—enhanced the authenticity of the data and its potential application beyond the immediate study. Furthermore, the rationale for participant selection was clearly explained, ensuring that data reflected a range of perspectives. The researcher also included comparisons with existing literature and examined negative cases that diverged from dominant themes. This strategy of acknowledging outliers demonstrated analytical balance and supported a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. These actions collectively underpinned the transferability of the interview guide and its findings across similar educational or institutional contexts (Miles et al., 2014).

### **3.13.3. Dependability**

Dependability emphasizes the stability and consistency of the research process over time. It is analogous to reliability in quantitative research and ensures that findings are the result of a traceable and logical process (Nowell et al., 2017). To establish dependability, the researcher meticulously documented each step of the research process, from data collection to analysis, through handwritten notes, field observations, and audio recordings. This documentation created a clear audit trail and reinforced procedural integrity. According to the document, the researcher maintained detailed handwritten records of all activities and interactions during data collection, particularly with Ghanaian women leaders in Technical Universities. These records included contextual data and reflexive observations, forming a comprehensive narrative of the study. Additionally, the use of CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) enabled the researcher to manage large volumes of complex data systematically. The software facilitated both triangulation and auditability, thus bolstering dependability. The data analysis process was rigorously

applied, ensuring internal consistency throughout the study. These deliberate and systematic procedures demonstrate that the interview guide was developed and applied in a methodologically sound and dependable manner ((Nowell et al., 2017; Patton, 2015).

#### **3.13.4. Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are shaped by participants' responses and not researcher bias or predispositions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It parallels objectivity in quantitative research. The researcher ensured confirmability by establishing a transparent audit trail and engaging participants in member checking. These strategies helped maintain neutrality and upheld the integrity of the findings. The document explicitly states that every phase of the data analysis process, from initial collection to final interpretation, was meticulously recorded. This audit trail captured the rationale behind all analytical decisions, thereby enabling others to verify the accuracy of the procedures. Member checking also played a pivotal role: participants were asked to review the findings and provide feedback on whether the interpretations aligned with their lived experiences. This participatory feedback loop minimized the risk of researcher-imposed meaning and ensured that participants' voices remained central. Through these measures, the researcher consistently demonstrated a commitment to transparency, objectivity, and accountability, thereby reinforcing the confirmability of the interview guide and the broader research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

#### **3.13.5. Audit Trail**

An audit trail refers to the systematic documentation of all decisions, procedures, and processes followed during the research to ensure transparency and replicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It serves as a roadmap that allows external reviewers to trace

how data were gathered, interpreted, and analysed. In this study, the researcher employed an extensive audit trail to support the integrity of the interview guide and overall methodology. The document outlines that the researcher maintained detailed notes on data collection instruments and interactions with participants. Records of transcription and translation procedures, including how speech nuances were represented, were also kept. The coding process was thoroughly documented, with explicit notes on code definitions, thematic groupings, and modifications. Additionally, the researcher recorded comparisons with existing literature and noted how challenges during data collection and analysis were addressed. This comprehensive log enabled reviewers to understand the study's trajectory and rationale at every step. By preserving a traceable path of inquiry, the researcher ensured that the interview guide could be evaluated, replicated, or refined with methodological transparency and rigour (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **3.13.6. Participant Validation**

Participant validation, also called member checking, involves returning data or findings to participants for verification, thus ensuring authenticity and accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It empowers participants to confirm, refute, or elaborate on the researcher's interpretations. The researcher in this study implemented Participant validation rigorously, embedding it as a continuous feature throughout the research process. The document affirms that after data analysis, preliminary findings and themes were shared with participants, who were then invited to assess the accuracy of the interpretations. Member checking sessions, conducted individually or in groups, allowed participants to review transcripts, themes, and selected sections of the report. This iterative feedback helped identify potential misrepresentations or overlooked nuances. Participants were also encouraged to comment on whether the themes

reflected their lived experiences and to propose corrections. By using this strategy, the researcher not only validated the interview guide's reliability but also strengthened the collaborative ethos of the study. This process ensured that findings emerged from participant realities rather than researcher assumptions, thereby enhancing the overall trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **3.14. Researcher's Positionality**

In qualitative research, the researcher does not stand outside the inquiry process but is intricately woven into the fabric of the study. Recognizing this, I approached this research not as a detached observer but as a reflexive participant whose worldview, background, and values inevitably shaped the research process. My positionality, defined by my identity as a Ghanaian academic with a commitment to gender equity in higher education, significantly informed how I engaged with participants, interpreted data, and navigated ethical and methodological decisions.

Guided by the insights of Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2013), who stress that qualitative researchers function both as instruments of data collection and meaning-makers, I acknowledged that my presence, beliefs, and assumptions could influence the research setting. Thus, I deliberately positioned myself in a space of critical reflexivity, continuously interrogating how my perspectives could colour the interpretation of the lived leadership experiences of Ghanaian women in Technical Universities. This deep immersion and interpretive responsibility were consistent with the phenomenological orientation of the study, which centers the subjective experiences of participants and the interpretive lens of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My engagement with participants was shaped by a dual consciousness: as a researcher striving for academic rigour and as an insider with cultural affinity and sensitivity to

the nuances of gendered leadership in Ghana's educational context. I brought to the research both empathy and an acute awareness of the broader societal structures that frame women's leadership journeys. While this cultural proximity facilitated rapport and trust during in-depth interviews, I remained vigilant about the risk of over-identification. To maintain analytic clarity, I practiced 'epoché' consciously setting aside my assumptions and experiences in order to encounter participants' narratives on their own terms (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

The interviews were conducted using a conversational style that reflected both my academic training and my cultural orientation towards communal engagement and storytelling. This allowed participants to express themselves freely and authentically. I paid close attention to non-verbal cues, such as silences, hesitations, and emotional inflections, recognizing these as integral parts of the participants' meaning-making processes (Patton, 2015). At the same time, I was mindful of the power dynamics inherent in the research relationship and strove to create a dialogic space where participants felt heard, valued, and respected.

Importantly, I had no prior personal or professional relationships with any of the participants. This positional distance allowed me to maintain a degree of neutrality and objectivity, even as I brought cultural insight and empathetic understanding to the data collection process. My positionality as both insider and outsider enhanced my ability to interpret narratives critically, balancing proximity with analytical distance.

Ethical stewardship was central to my role. Before initiating fieldwork, I obtained informed consent and clearly communicated the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage and were provided with an environment conducive to open and secure dialogue. I

anonymized identities using alphabetic codes and stored all data securely, in alignment with ethical standards in conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

Throughout the study, I maintained detailed field notes and used audio recordings to capture both the content and context of each interview. These tools supported data triangulation and enabled a richer, more rigorous thematic analysis. I revisited the data multiple times, refining themes and checking interpretations for consistency and depth, as recommended by Miles et al. (2014). To enhance reflexivity, I kept a personal journal documenting my thoughts, methodological choices, emotional responses, and evolving interpretations. This practice provided a space for ongoing self-examination and helped me to navigate the tensions between my role as a researcher and my commitment to the empowerment of women in academia (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

Respect for participant autonomy remained paramount throughout the process. Each interview was guided by the participant's comfort and consent, with flexibility in pacing and structure. The choice of interview locations was left to participants, ensuring that conversations took place in settings where they felt secure and at ease.

Ultimately, my positionality shaped this study not only in its design and execution but also in its ethical and interpretive commitments. I entered the research space with a sense of responsibility, to listen deeply, interpret thoughtfully, and represent the participants' experiences with integrity. By embracing my role as a reflexive, culturally situated, and ethically conscious researcher, I aimed to honor the voices of Ghanaian women leaders and contribute meaningfully to the discourse on gender and leadership in higher education.

Aligned with my articulated positionality, I adopted an emic stance in this research, operating as an insider within the cultural and institutional milieu under investigation.

This approach, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm and consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological orientation of the study, enabled me to generate contextually rich and culturally nuanced understandings of women's leadership experiences in Ghanaian Technical Universities. As a Ghanaian academic with experiential familiarity with the socio-cultural norms, gendered expectations, and institutional logics shaping academic leadership, my emic perspective allowed for deeper resonance with participants' lived realities. This insider position facilitated trust, openness, and dialogic depth during data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), fostering an environment where participants could speak freely about sensitive, often unarticulated dimensions of their professional trajectories. At the same time, my reflexive stance and methodological rigour safeguarded against over-identification and interpretive bias. By navigating the interplay between empathy and analytical distance, I was able to illuminate patterns and contradictions in participants' narratives that may have remained obscured to an etic researcher. Ultimately, the emic stance proved instrumental in achieving the study's objective: to excavate and interpret the subjective meanings women ascribe to their leadership journeys, while critically engaging with the broader structural and cultural forces that contour those experiences.

### **3.15. Data Triangulation**

This study employed methodological triangulation as the primary form of data triangulation. Methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple data collection methods to explore a phenomenon from different angles, thereby enhancing the richness, credibility, and depth of the findings (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, semi-structured one-on-one interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were

strategically combined to illuminate the lived experiences of female leaders in Ghanaian Technical Universities.

The justification for employing methodological triangulation lies in the interpretive orientation of hermeneutic phenomenology, which values the co-construction of meaning through both individual subjectivity and shared intersubjective engagement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allowed for deep, individualized exploration of personal leadership journeys, enabling participants to articulate nuanced meanings rooted in their specific socio-cultural and institutional contexts. Conversely, FGDs offered a dialogical platform for collective reflection, wherein participants negotiated, reinforced, or contested themes that emerged during individual interviews. This dynamic generated what Gadamer (1975) refers to as a “fusion of horizons,” enabling broader interpretive understanding.

Importantly, the triangulated approach not only allowed for validation through convergence of data but also amplified thematic complexity by surfacing unique insights that were contextually bound to group dialogue, such as informal mentoring and adaptive alliance-building. This methodological synergy enhanced interpretive rigor, affirmed the trustworthiness of the findings, and aligned with the phenomenological imperative to explore meaning as constituted in both individual and communal experiences. Thus, triangulation served as both a strategy for methodological robustness and a philosophical commitment to capturing the multilayered essence of lived experience.

### **3.16. Ethical Consideration of the Study**

In conducting this study, the researcher ensured that the principles of access and ethics guided every phase of the research process. As emphasized by Arifin (2018),

access to participants and data sources was not merely logistical but ethical, requiring that consent be both informed and freely granted. The researcher secured access to participants who were relevant and suitable for the study's objectives, ensuring that participation was a mutual engagement grounded in respect and understanding. From the outset, the researcher prioritized transparency and clarity. Participants were thoroughly informed about the purpose, scope, and significance of the study. They were made aware of how their contributions would shape the research outcomes and were assured that their insights were both valued and indispensable. The researcher clearly communicated how the information provided would be used, thereby fostering an ethical environment based on mutual respect. To protect participants, the researcher upheld stringent ethical safeguards. Anonymity was preserved by assigning codes instead of names, while confidentiality was maintained by securely storing all data and restricting access to only the researcher. Participation remained strictly voluntary, free from coercion or pressure at any stage of the study. Finally, the researcher maintained neutrality and impartiality in both data analysis and interpretation, ensuring that the findings were presented without bias or external influence. Participants were treated not as passive subjects but as co-constructors of knowledge, and this ethical stance remained the guiding compass throughout the research journey.

### **3.17. Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed and methodological blueprint outlining how the researcher collected, processed, evaluated, and presented the primary data that formed the core of the study. It delineated the research design and methodology employed to systematically investigate the barriers and opportunities women encountered in their career progression within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. The

chapter also elaborated on the approach adopted to meet the methodological demands of the study.

The researcher emphasized the use of a phenomenological research strategy, which was chosen to capture the lived experiences of women occupying key leadership roles. This strategy was rigorously defended as the most suitable for unveiling nuanced personal and institutional challenges affecting women's upward mobility in academia. The researcher meticulously detailed the data collection procedures, justifying each methodological choice and demonstrating how these decisions enhanced the comprehensiveness and depth of the insights obtained. Issues related to data management and processing were addressed with precision, ensuring the integrity, accuracy, and validity of the information gathered. Ethical considerations were also thoroughly discussed, including the specific safeguards implemented to protect participants' rights and privacy.

The subsequent chapter, Chapter Four, presented the results of the study, offered an in-depth analysis, and discussed the findings in relation to existing literature. This served to contextualize the outcomes, draw meaningful conclusions, and contribute to the broader discourse on gender equity in academic leadership ultimately advocating for systemic change and greater inclusivity within Ghana's higher education sector.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter delineated the methodological framework employed in investigating barriers to women career progression trends in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. Qualitative data was collected from 12 female leaders in Technical Universities utilising a semi-structured interview guide. This chapter is in three segments. The first segment shows the results on the demographic characteristics of the Participants followed by its discussion. The second section of the chapter focuses on the presentation of the main findings to address the research questions. The third part also focused on the discussion of the main results in light of the research questions.

#### 4.2. Background Information of the Study Participants

This section delves into the demographic characteristics of the Participants who were used for the study. This comprehensive background information includes variables such as marital status, number of children, work experience in the field of education, as well as highest education qualification. The detailed background information is presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Participants' Codes and Demographics**

<b>Participants Code</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>No. of Children</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Work Exp</b>
MMI 1A	Married	2	Registrar	PHD	32
MMI 2A	Married	2	Registrar	MPHIL	26
MMI 3A	Married	4	Head of Department	MPHIL	18
MMI 4A	Married	4	Director	MPHIL	20
MMI 1CC	Married	2	Director	MPHIL	35
MMI 2CC	Married	3	Director	PHD	26
MMI 1T	Married	2	Director	PHD	27
MMI 2T	Married	2	Director	PHD	36
MMI 3T	Married	2	Dean	PHD	32
MMI 1K	Married	3	Career Development Officer	MPHIL	20
MMI 2K	Married	3	Deputy Director	PHD	25
MMI 1H	Married	2	Faculty Officer	MPHIL	18

Source: Field survey, 2024

A look at Table 1 reveals the participants' codes used in this study, providing clear identification and context for each interview. Each code begins with the abbreviation MM, meaning Management Role, and I for Interviewee: The numbers 1 to 4 signify the number of interviewees and finally, the abbreviations ATU, TTU, CCTU, KTU, HTU signifies the Technical Universities where the participants were interviewed. As depicted in Table 2, MMI 1A represent the first participant interviewed from Accra Technical University. Also, the Table further demonstrates that, twelve women in leadership positions were interviewed for this study.

The demographic analysis presented above demonstrated that, all participants, regardless of their university affiliation, are married. This finding is significant because, being married can impose additional responsibilities that potentially may impact women career advancement. The support system available to these married

women, such as spousal support and family dynamics, could play a critical role in their career progression.

The demographic results further demonstrate that the participants hold a range of leadership roles, including Head of Department, Director, Career Development Officer, Deputy Director, Faculty Officer, and others. This diversity in high-ranking positions highlights that some proportion of women have achieved significant leadership roles within technical universities. However, the concentration in administrative and supportive roles, rather than top executive positions, suggests a potential ceiling for career progression.

Regarding academic qualifications, the participants predominantly hold advanced degrees, with several possessing PhDs and MPhils. The attainment of such high qualifications indicates that educational attainment is not a primary barrier for these women. In other words, their respective highest academic degrees qualify them for leadership roles in Technical University. However, despite their high qualifications, the persistent barriers to reaching the very top of the hierarchy suggest that structural and cultural factors within the universities may impede further career advancement. This could include institutional biases, lack of mentorship opportunities, and limited access to professional networks.

The participants' work experience ranges from 18 to 36 years, demonstrating a substantial amount of professional expertise and dedication to their fields. Such extensive experience underscores that these women have not only the qualifications but also the practical knowledge necessary for top leadership roles. Nonetheless, the lengthy duration of their careers juxtaposed with their current positions may reflect systemic barriers that slow their upward mobility.

Lastly, all participants have children, with the number of children ranging from two to four. This demographic characteristic is crucial as it highlights the dual roles many women have to balance between professional responsibilities and motherhood. The presence of children could potentially act as a barrier to career progression if there is insufficient support for balancing work and family life. Institutional policies such as flexible working hours, parental leave and child care support can significantly influence how well women can manage these dual roles, and the lack thereof could hinder their career advancement.

### **4.3. Presentation of Findings (Interview Schedule)**

This section presents the findings in relation to the research questions. The study centered around six key research questions, and data relevant to these inquiries were gathered from a sample comprising 12 female leaders in Technical Universities in the Southern Ghana. The narratives shared by these female leaders are presented and organized thematically in alignment with the research questions. To thoroughly address the research questions, the study meticulously gathered data from a select group of participants holding leadership positions at Technical Universities in the Southern regions. Each research question was designed to explore a specific aspect of these women's leadership experiences. Consequently, the responses and stories shared by the participants were carefully analysed and categorized into themes that directly correspond to each research question.

#### **4.3.1. Theme 1: Career progression of women in leadership in the Technical Universities of Southern Ghana**

This theme aligns with the Research Question “What are the career progressions of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana?” The analysis of participants' narratives revealed rich and diverse experiences of career

progression within Technical Universities in Southern Ghana. Through in-depth interviews with the twelve women leaders, several key issues emerged, capturing the essence of their leadership journeys. These themes include: Personal Journey and Key Transitions, Motivations and Evolving Aspirations, Evolving Leadership Style and Lessons Learned, Defining Moments and Influential Decisions, Mentorship and Support for Aspiring Women Leaders, and Future Aspirations and Career Goals.

#### **4.3.1.1. Personal Journey and Key Milestones**

Participants detailed their career progression during the interviews, highlighting unique journeys into leadership roles within Ghanaian Technical Universities. They revealed how educational advancement, strategic career decisions, and overcoming systemic challenges helped shape their personal and professional development. Their stories reflect resilience, ambition, and dedication to service and institutional growth.

MMI 1A shared how her educational pursuits and early aspirations fueled her rise through the ranks, despite the complexities of team leadership.

*My career journey started with a Bachelor of Arts from UCC... In 2004, I began as an administrator, advanced to Deputy Registrar, and now to my current position. Leading is fulfilling, though managing diverse teams constantly tests my decision-making.*

Aligning with the narrative of gradual career progression and leadership

responsibility (MMI 2K) recounted:

*“My journey into leadership has been a gradual process. I started in a junior administrative role and, over the years, moved through several positions until I eventually assumed a senior leadership role. Each stage of that journey strengthened my capacity to manage people and make difficult decisions.”*

Similarly, MMI 2A explained that moving across several administrative roles strengthened her leadership capacity.

She said:

*“Each position—from one continuous professional development workshop to a further study tested and built my leadership capacity.”*

Another participant further reinforced the importance of gradual professional growth:

*“My progress did not happen overnight. Each position taught me something important about leadership and institutional management.”* (MMI 3T)

Another participant also emphasised the cumulative nature of career growth:

*“Every stage of my career prepared me for the next responsibility. I had to grow through each role before moving forward.”* (MMI 2K)

Also, MMI 2A described a career marked by strategic role transitions and responsibilities that shaped her leadership.

*In 1998, I was hired as an administrative assistant... by 2022, I became the substantive head of HR. Each position—from counselling to admissions to hostel management—tested and built my leadership capacity.*

On the same score, MMI 2K recounted:

*“I can link my transition from one level to the other to the roles and responsibilities that I was given. Those roles pushed me up steadily.”*

On the other hand, MMI-1CC recounted how academic networks and determination helped her overcome gender-based barriers to policy reform.

*My journey through leadership at the Technical University has been both challenging and supportive. Starting as an officer in a male-dominated community, I faced resistance while climbing up especially when advocating for policy changes. Despite this, lobbying and alliances helped me navigate these challenges, and being a woman sometimes worked to my advantage.*

Similarly, MMI 2K added that:

*My leadership journey at my present institution has encompassed both significant challenges and considerable support. Initially appointed as an officer in a predominantly male environment, I encountered resistance, particularly in pursuing policy reforms. Nevertheless, strategic networking and the formation of alliances facilitated my navigation through these obstacles. Moreover, my identity as a woman occasionally served as an advantageous factor in this process.*

Likewise, MMI 2CC emphasized persistence and academic advancement as keys to her ascent.

*Starting as Senior Administrative Assistant in 1998, I earned an MPhil in Admin and climbed through roles—Academic Affairs, General Admin—to my current position as Director of Legal Consular and General Services.*

MMI 1T mapped out a steady climb from entry-level finance roles to departmental leadership.

*I began as an Accounting Assistant... moved through Administrative Assistant, Senior Accountant, and eventually to Deputy Director of Audits. Today, I'm head of the department—a journey built on every stage.*

Contrastingly, MMI 2T traced her journey from administrative support to academic leadership, underscoring how scholarship and persistence were vital in overcoming early professional resistance.

*My journey within the Technical University began as an administrator, but my path quickly evolved into academia... Despite facing obstacles, including bureaucratic hurdles, I persisted, eventually ascending to the role of senior registrar in 2013... in 2016... I achieved a significant milestone as the first female professor in the university's history.*

MMI 3T described a multidimensional career spanning administration and academic leadership.

*I started as Assistant Registrar 19 years ago. From Exams Office to Faculty Officer, then Director of Academic Affairs—I've led at every phase, often being among the few women in those spaces.*

MMI 3A shared her leadership within a male-dominated department and later in gender advocacy.

*My leadership journey Technical University began with my appointment as Head of a department of mostly men. I fostered inclusivity. My leadership journey was further tested when I became the Deputy Director for CEGRAD..., I pivoted strategies to ensure equal representation without confrontation.*

MMI 2A corroborated with a similar storey.

*I started as the coordinator for Supervised Occupational Experience. I became the Head of Academic Affairs Section for a long time, and then to the present post. If I became popular, it is all because of my sensitivity to gender issues.*

Likewise, MMI 4A illustrated a career built on academic and institutional leadership.

*I began as a lecturer, and after my PhD in 2012, I became HOD, then Dean, then Director of the Gender Center. I've chaired convocation and several boards, constantly shifting roles yet rooted in institutional growth.*

MMI 1K described a self-driven journey marked by consistent achievement and adaptability.

*From Admissions and Exams to various departments, I've worked my way up. Wherever I've been, I've excelled. Now as Career Development Officer, I see this as a product of my personal accomplishments.*

MMI 2K recounted a holistic academic path, with community service shaping her leadership.

*I joined as a lecturer in 2007... took up hall leadership, went for further studies, returned, and served as Deputy Director. I've always balanced teaching, research, and community service.*

MMI 1H expressed contentment and alignment with her professional path.

*I began as Principal Admin Assistant, rose to Junior Assistant Registrar, and later Senior Assistant Registrar after earning further education. This journey aligns with who I aspired to become.*

Considering the above, it is worth noting that, the narratives reveal that the personal leadership journeys of the participants were shaped by a blend of education, opportunity, institutional support, and individual agency. While some experienced resistance—often gender-based—others leaned on academic networks, personal perseverance, and strategic upskilling to navigate upward mobility. Despite differing paths, a unifying thread across all accounts is resilience and a shared drive to lead and influence their institutions meaningfully.

#### 4.3.1.2. Motivations and Evolving Aspirations

The researcher engaged participants in conversations to delve deeper into the driving forces behind their pursuit of leadership roles in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana and how their aspirations evolved over the course of their careers. These narratives portray how the participants were inspired by intrinsic leadership traits, mentorship, role models, or a strong work ethic. Others were propelled by societal challenges such as gender biases or a desire to serve and make a lasting impact. One participant, identified as Participant ‘MM1 1A’ reflected on how her intrinsic leadership qualities and the influence of supportive leaders shaped her aspirations:

*I’ve always believed I possess the natural ability to lead and relate well with others. Working under great leaders and in strong teams nurtured my dream of becoming a good administrator—someone who supports others while growing in leadership myself.*

MMI 2K added similar narration to support the above.

*I know my leadership is intrinsic. I am always self-motivated and that takes leaders very far.*

Another participant shared that leadership was not a deliberate pursuit at first but rather a result of consistently striving for excellence in her roles:

*At first, I just wanted to excel in every role. But as I moved through different positions, I started learning intentionally, reading, and allowing mentorship—some mentors didn’t even know they were guiding me. Over time, I found myself developing real leadership ambitions (MMI 2A).*

Likewise, a participant noted how early life experiences and the male-dominated structure of leadership fueled her determination to rise:

*I always wanted to be the best in whatever I did. Hearing my siblings complain about their bosses made me determined to be a different kind of leader—one who influences positively. My leadership journey has been about climbing to positions where I can shape change and mentor others (MMI 1CC).*

Another interviewee attributed her leadership aspirations to inspiration from role models and a personal resolve to take on challenges:

*I took the challenge to lead because I saw others do it well, especially my female role model in the polytechnic. I told myself I could do it too (MMI 2CC).*

This resonated with Participant ‘MMI 3T’ who shared how influential women leaders inspired her early career path:

*During my early career, I encountered strong women leaders whose impact stayed with me. Their examples encouraged me to keep pushing and climbing the academic ladder.*

In another account, early encounters with influential women in leadership shaped one participant’s aspirations:

*I met some strong women leaders early in my career, and they inspired me. That’s when I decided to climb the ladder, no matter what (MMI 3T).*

Contrastingly, another participant did not initially plan for leadership but adopted a mindset of progression that eventually led her there:

*I didn’t set out to be a leader, but I’ve always believed in moving forward. That belief has guided me consistently and brought me to where I am now (MMI 1T).*

Similarly, one participant attributed her rise to an unwavering commitment to diligence and inner drive, not titles:

*For me, leadership came from consistently working hard and rising above challenges. I didn’t chase positions—my motivation came from my own perseverance and drive (MMI 2T).*

One participant emphasized the importance of qualifications and how that mindset shaped her aspirations:

*I pushed myself to complete my PhD while heading a department. I knew early that leadership wasn’t about who you know, but how well you prepare. I now mentor others to keep improving and never settle (MMI 3A).*

Similarly, a sense of service drove another participant’s motivations:

*To me, leadership means serving and shaping institutions. I always aim to leave a legacy of hard work and positive change wherever I work (MMI 4A).*

Likewise, another participant's drive was rooted in the desire for upward mobility and preparation through learning:

*I started small, but the goal was always to move up. Every workday was a step toward a higher position. I focused on preparing myself with training and education to grow steadily (MMI 1K).*

One participant emphasized her motivation to inspire students and bring systemic change:

*I realized early that leadership gives you a broader platform to influence young minds. Shifting from teaching to leadership has helped me make strategic decisions that foster institutional growth (MMI 2K).*

Finally, another participant, traced her leadership aspirations back to early administrative experiences in secondary school:

*My leadership journey started back in secondary school when I helped with office tasks. Since then, I've naturally progressed into administrative roles, building my career in that direction (MMI 1H).*

Considering the above, it is worth noting that, the participants' journeys into leadership within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana reflect a diverse set of motivations. While some were inspired by early ambitions or influential role models, others found their aspirations evolving through hard work, opportunity, and mentorship. Collectively, their stories portray leadership as a dynamic and purpose-driven journey grounded in service, resilience, and continuous growth.

#### **4.3.1.3. Evolving Leadership Style and Lessons Learned**

As part of career progression trends among women in university leadership roles, the participants shared how their leadership styles and approaches evolved as they moved into higher positions. Each narrative reflected personal growth, adaptability, and the

acquisition of valuable lessons over time. One participant highlighted a shift from a friendly to a more balanced approach.

*My leadership style has always been friendly...I relate easily with subordinates because I don't believe in the 'bossy' approach. But over time, I've learned that some abuse that closeness. Now, I'm more cautious—assigning roles with clear expectations and following up to ensure accountability, while still keeping the approach open. (MMI 1A)*

Another participant described her leadership evolution as adaptive, changing according to the specific challenges and people she encountered in different roles. This adaptability was key to her success in higher leadership positions.

*My leadership style keeps evolving—I adjust based on the team and the challenge before me. Each new role teaches me something new, so I've learned that there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Being flexible and switching styles when necessary has really helped me grow as a leader. (MMI 2A)*

A statement that supports the above goes like:

*I try as much as possible to adjust my leadership style at every point in time, because always following the same style may not suit every team. Besides, when people can pre-empt what you will do, they devise strategies to counter it and foil your ideas.*

Emphasizing inclusivity and collaboration, another participant shared that early autocratic methods led to resistance. Her leadership style evolved to involve team members in decision-making, creating a supportive and effective environment.

*I started off a bit autocratic, but I soon realized it led to resistance...Now I encourage collaboration, seek input, and mentor my team for future roles. Regular meetings keep us aligned, and this inclusive style has brought greater satisfaction and better results. (MMI 1CC)*

Another participant employed a mix of leadership styles—transformational, coaching, laissez-faire, and servant leadership—each used strategically to motivate subordinates and foster progress.

*Over time, I've used a blend of styles—transformational, coaching, servant leadership...depending on what works best in the moment. These approaches have not only motivated my team but also contributed to my growth and promotion within the institution. (MMI 2CC)*

Balancing leadership styles was important for another participant, who primarily leaned on transactional methods to ensure accountability while motivating staff ethically.

*I've grown into a transactional leader—assigning tasks clearly and motivating through recognition and trust, not money. I also apply democratic and laissez-faire traits when needed. This blend helps me support the team effectively across various scenarios. (MMI 1T)*

Another participant emphasized how her leadership approach adjusted based on observed workplace behaviours. This allowed her to maintain standards while learning to navigate institutional dynamics.

*At first, I gave people space to work freely, assuming everyone shared my work ethic...but many were more interested in gossip and politics. I had to reset—setting daily targets and pushing for results, even when it made me unpopular. I've learned to stay focused but flexible within the system. (MMI 2T)*

Focusing on transformational leadership, one participant inspired followers to embrace change, while also committing to her own growth and that of her team.

*My style centers on transformation—I aim to inspire others to realize their potential and adapt to change. I embrace growth myself, and I guide my followers to stretch beyond their limits for the good of the Organisation. (MMI 3T)*

Fostering an inclusive and participatory environment, another participant stressed the importance of collective decision-making while also learning to manage delays caused by familiarity.

*I lead through inclusion—treating everyone as part of a team, regardless of rank. I've always encouraged participation in decision-making, even if it slows things down sometimes. I've learned to balance this approach with timely action. (MMI 3A)*

Another participant's leadership journey moved from administrative focus to mentoring and legacy-building, recognizing the importance of investing in others.

*When I first became HOD, I was focused on getting the administrative work done...but as I rose higher, I realized it's more important to mentor others and lead by example. That's what leaves a lasting legacy. (MMI 4A)*

Acknowledging the need for flexibility, one participant described adjusting her style to suit the personalities and expectations of her team.

Emphasizing teamwork and collaboration, another participant learned that building strong teams was the foundation for achieving collective success.

*As I moved up, I realized that success depends on teamwork. My leadership now focuses on building and empowering teams. I've learned that when the team thrives, everyone—including the leader—succeeds. (MMI 2K)*

For one participant, empowering subordinates through training and involvement became central to sustaining operations even in her absence.

*I always involve and train my subordinates so that even when I'm away, they perform confidently and independently. That gives me peace, knowing I've built a team that doesn't rely solely on my presence. (MMI 1H)*

Considering the above, the participants' reflections reveal a dynamic journey of leadership growth shaped by practical experiences and contextual realities. Many began with fixed or idealistic approaches, but real-world challenges prompted them to adapt—embracing flexibility, collaboration, and strategic balance. Some learned the cost of over-trusting subordinates, while others discovered the value of mentorship, inclusivity, and team-building. A common thread across narratives is the conscious evolution from task-focused leadership to people-centered approaches, anchored in continuous learning and emotional intelligence. These shifts highlight the critical role of self-awareness, adaptability, and strategic thinking in the leadership progression of women in university management.

#### 4.3.1.4. Defining Moments and Influential Decisions

The participants shared various defining moments and decisions that significantly influenced their career progression as women leaders within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. Participant MMI 1A highlighted the importance of opportunity and support from institutional structures. She emphasized that her qualification and experience made her eligible for leadership roles, and the search committee's readiness to support women based on merit was crucial.

*At one point in my career, I realized my qualifications and experience made me eligible for leadership roles. What truly defined my career, however, was the willingness of the search committee to support women based on merit, particularly when no female member was present in the management committee. I was given the opportunity, and that changed everything. (MMI 1A)*

Participant MMI 2A reflected on an unexpected career shift to the HR department, which pushed her to pursue further education and broaden her career.

*A defining moment in my career was when I was appointed to the HR department without a formal background in HR. This was unexpected, but it drove me to pursue a professional course in HR, particularly in legal issues. That decision significantly enhanced my capabilities, and I could excel in my new role, shaping my future career path. (MMI 2A)*

Participant MMI 1CC described her journey from an uncertain career path to finding her passion in student affairs. Her shift to education and subsequent engagement with students in an industrial setting provided a fulfilling career direction:

*Initially, my career path wasn't clear, and I wasn't sure where to go after secondary school. However, when I ventured into education, I discovered my passion for guiding youth. A defining moment came when I realized the potential of working in student affairs—my opportunity to engage with students in an industrial setting confirmed this as the right career path. (MMI 1CC)*

Participant MMI 2CC simply articulated the influence of role models in her career decision-making:

*Watching other women succeed in their careers made me believe I could do the same. Their success became a defining factor in my decision to pursue leadership positions and aim for my career aspirations. I realized that being a successful career woman was achievable, and I set out to follow that path. (MMI 2CC)*

Participant MMI 1CC shared her experience with informal mentorship, highlighting the impact of offering support and guidance to other women, despite not organizing formal programmes within her institution:

*Although I didn't organize formal mentorship programmes at the university, I often provided guidance to women within the institution. Many sought my advice, and I found that these casual mentoring conversations were impactful. Outside the university, as a Chartered Accountant, I engaged in formal mentorship. Even without structured programmes at the University, my informal guidance made a difference. (MMI 1T)*

Participant MMI 2CC also reflected on her transition from administration to academia, driven by resistance from superiors who perceived her as a threat. This shift allowed her to focus on her strengths without facing unnecessary conflicts:

*A turning point in my career was when I transitioned from administration to academia. I faced resistance from superiors who perceived my capabilities as a threat. This prompted me to shift to teaching, a decision that allowed me to focus on my strengths without the same opposition. This change taught me how to navigate conflicts and prioritize my own growth. (MMI 2T)*

Participant MMI 3T emphasized the importance of knowing and pursuing what matters most to her:

*My defining moments are rooted in understanding what's important to me and following that path. When I realized what I truly valued, I made decisions that aligned with those priorities. This clarity shaped my career and gave me the confidence to pursue leadership roles with a clear sense of purpose. (MMI 3T)*

Participant MMI 3A recounted challenging gender stereotypes in leadership roles and the influence of her father's emphasis on independence:

*A defining moment in my career was challenging the notion that leadership roles are mainly for men. Early on, I questioned why men were deemed more*

*suitable for leadership despite having the same qualifications. This belief in my capabilities drove me to pursue roles traditionally held by men. Despite facing stereotypes and being seen as snobbish, I remained steadfast. My promotion to associate professor and successful elections highlighted my resilience and commitment to excellence (MMI 3A).*

Participant MMI 4A shared her experience as a Head of Department (HOD) in a male-dominated field, balancing firmness with empathy to foster a supportive environment:

*One defining moment was becoming an HOD in a male-dominated field. I balanced firmness with empathy, establishing a welfare scheme for my department and fostering a supportive environment (MMI 4A)*

Participant MMI 1K described how the transition of polytechnics to fully-fledged universities created new leadership opportunities, prompting her to prepare for these roles:

*When polytechnics transitioned into full-fledged universities, new leadership positions became available. The expansion of the university created new offices and faculties, and I recognized this as the perfect opportunity to prepare myself for leadership roles. My experience and qualifications made me ready, and I was determined to be part of that growth. (MMI 1K)*

Participant MMI 2K reflected on the influence of supportive individuals and her PhD supervisor in encouraging her growth and exploration within the university setting:

*Several defining moments in my career were shaped by the support I received from individuals who cared about my growth. My PhD supervisor played a pivotal role, encouraging me to explore opportunities for career advancement within the university. Their belief in my potential inspired me to confidently pursue my goals, solidifying my career trajectory. (MMI 2K)*

Participant MMI 1H highlighted the role of spirituality in her career decisions, relying on prayer and seeking divine guidance before making significant moves:

*Honestly, I am a very spiritual person. Before making any decision, I make sure to pray and seek God's guidance. This has guided my career progression since I joined the University. I recall a time when I wanted to become a management member of the University. Despite qualifying for the position, I still sought God's guidance for favour (MMI 1H).*

From the above, the participants' reflections on their defining moments and influential decisions demonstrate a deep interplay between external factors and personal growth in their leadership journeys. Key themes include the impact of institutional support, educational opportunities, role models, and spirituality. Many participants emphasized pivotal moments of career shifts, such as moving into new roles or fields, overcoming gender stereotypes, and building supportive environments. What stands out is their proactive approach to shaping their careers whether through gaining new qualifications, mentoring others, or leaning on personal beliefs. Each participant's defining moments reveals a unique blend of external circumstances and internal convictions that guided them toward leadership roles.

#### **4.3.1.5. Mentorship and Support for Aspiring Women Leaders**

The participants shared diverse ways in which they have leveraged their expertise and experiences to mentor and support other women aspiring to leadership roles within the technical education sector. The narratives shared by these female leaders highlighted their efforts and commitment to empowering women through mentorship, whether through direct support, structured programmes, or role modeling. Their narratives illustrate a range of approaches, from informal guidance and role modelling to structured mentorship programmes and advocacy for educational advancement.

During the interview session, Participant MMI 1A emphasized the practical approach of delegating tasks to women and observing their performance, intervening only when necessary.

*I assign some roles to some of the women I have worked with. I just leave the task under their care and I observe. So I normally come in when the need be. I give them the opportunities to take up certain tasks and, in a way, I mentor them and give them the necessary supports (MMI 1A).*

Participant MMI 2T discussed mentoring through informal interactions and task delegation, both within and outside the office, aiming to help women develop leadership skills and navigate their career paths:

*I mentor others primarily through informal interactions, delegating tasks while coaching and educating my staff. I also share my experiences outside the office, offering guidance and support to other women aspiring to leadership roles. By providing orientation and mentorship, I aim to help them navigate their career paths and develop their leadership skills (MMI 2T)*

Participant MMI 1CC shared success stories of encouraging her secretary and colleagues to pursue further education and career advancements, highlighting her dedication to empowering women:

*I encouraged my secretary to pursue further education despite initial resistance, leading to her promotion to senior assistant registrar. Another colleague, facing challenges, earned her master's degree with my support. I also helped a mentee transition from banking to a leadership role in counselling. These successes highlight my dedication to empowering women to advance their careers (MMI 1CC).*

Participant MMI 2CC noted her role as a model and coach, encouraging female subordinates to embrace leadership opportunities:

*I serve as a role model for other female subordinates and with my coaching skills, I have encouraged them to take up leadership roles when given the opportunity (MMI 2CC).*

Participant MMI 1A highlighted the impact of informal support and guidance, as well as her formal involvement in mentorship programmes outside the university, illustrating the breadth of her influence:

*While I haven't organized formal mentoring programmes for women at the University, I frequently provide informal support and guidance. Many women see me as a role model and seek my advice, which I gladly offer. Through casual conversations and by sharing my experiences, I indirectly mentor and inspire them. Although my efforts at the University are informal, they have positively impacted many young women aspiring to leadership roles. (MMI 1T).*

Similarly, Participant MMI 2CC focused on encouraging further education and personal development, promoting a culture of mutual growth and support without competition:

*I have always encouraged others to pursue further education and personal development. My approach to mentoring involves leading by example and providing support without creating a sense of competition. I help others navigate challenges by sharing my experiences and strategies for overcoming obstacles. By promoting a culture of mutual growth and encouragement, I aim to foster an environment where everyone can succeed based on their merits and hard work (MMI 2T).*

More so, Participant MMI 3T leveraged her experience to address unconscious biases and foster mentorship and networking within the university:

*As a woman leader, I have tried my best possible in addressing unconscious biases and encouraging mentorship and networking in this University. I also lead by example and always help women to focus on what they do (MMI 3T).*

Participant MMI 3A emphasized using her success to uplift others, setting clear goals for her team, and inspiring colleagues to pursue further education:

*As a Christian, I prioritize blessing others over seeking blessings for myself. My success drives me to uplift those around me. When I started my current job, I set clear goals for my team. I challenged a colleague to write three papers, which she's diligently pursuing. I use my experiences to motivate others, like a man now pursuing his PhD in the UK who credits my encouragement. Together, we grow and succeed (MMI 3A).*

Participant MMI 4A combined informal mentorship with structured initiatives like Women in Technical Education and Development, organizing workshops and seminars to empower women:

*I've mentored and supported other women through informal means and structured initiatives like Women in Technical Education and Development. We organized workshops and seminars to encourage and empower women (MMI 4A).*

Participant MMI 1K described participation in women's associations on campus, which provide mutual mentorship and support for female students:

*On campus, we have various women's associations, such as Women in Technical Education in Ghana (WITED). This association was formed by a female staff member here, so we are various female leaders in that association; all of us mentor each other. We also mentor female students' associations like WINE and WOCOM to be leaders in the nation (MMI 1K).*

Participant MMI 2K highlighted mentoring women by sharing her journey of balancing academia and family, advocating for supportive policies, and encouraging professional growth:

*Leveraging my own experiences, I've been actively mentoring and supporting other women aspiring to leadership roles within the technical education sector. Sharing my journey, including navigating academia while managing family responsibilities, has served as a source of inspiration for them. By advocating for policies that facilitate academic progression, such as pursuing terminal degrees, I've actively contributed to fostering a supportive environment for women in leadership (MMI 2K).*

Participant MMI 1H emphasized her openness to mentoring, using her experiences to guide and inspire women aspiring to leadership roles despite her busy schedule:

*I try to mentor everyone that comes under my tutelage. I know I won't be here forever. Despite my busy schedule, I'm open and free to assist any woman aspiring to management. I always use my experience as an example to them (MMI 1H).*

The accounts the female leaders used for the study highlight a robust and varied culture of mentorship among women leaders in technical universities. Participants use both informal and formal strategies to guide aspiring female leaders, such as task delegation, promoting further education, and setting an example. Their mentorship goes beyond professional development, incorporating life lessons, spiritual values, and advocating for institutional change. This collective effort fosters individual growth while cultivating a wider culture of empowerment and inclusivity. This implies that, mentorship, whether formal or informal, is essential for developing the next generation of women leaders.

#### **4.3.1.6. Future Aspirations and Career Goals**

As part of their career progression, the female leaders in technical universities shared their aspirations and goals for the future. Their responses deepen their committed to continuous learning, mentoring, and making meaningful contributions. Also, their aspirations reflect a blend of personal growth, professional excellence, and a strong desire to inspire and empower the next generation of women leaders in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. Interview Participant, MMI 1A, expressed her intent to continue learning and developing professionally, even after reaching the

highest administrative position of registrar. She emphasized the importance of staying updated with technological advancements in university governance:

*Even though the highest in the administrative cadre is the registrar, and I have been able to attain that feat, I wouldn't relent on my efforts to learn new things by attending ongoing professional development programmes on modern University governance. Now that technology is evolving and becoming part of administration, I would have to stay abreast (MMI 1A).*

Participant MMI 2A aims to expand her impact both nationally and internationally, inspired by her mentor's continued contributions post-retirement.

*Looking ahead, I aspire to expand my impact beyond my current role, drawing inspiration from my mentor, who continued to contribute significantly after retirement. Despite my age, I am motivated to pursue opportunities on both national and international fronts, following in the footsteps of such leaders. My goal is to continue growing and making a difference in the technical education sector (MMI 2T).*

Participant MMI 1CC plans to continue her current role until retirement and then revive a youth leadership training initiative:

*With five years left until retirement, my goal is to continue in my current role as a liaison, a position I find deeply fulfilling. Post-retirement, I plan to partner with one colleague to revive a youth leadership training initiative interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This program, aimed at training young women in leadership, aligns with my passion for mentoring and developing future leaders. (MMI 1CC).*

Participant MMI 1T aspires to support and inspire young women, helping them balance personal responsibilities with professional excellence:

*Looking ahead, my aspirations as a woman leader at the Technical University involve continuing to support and inspire young women. By setting an example and offering guidance, I hope to empower women to see themselves not just as women, but as influential professionals in their fields (MMI 1T).*

Participant MMI 2T focuses on hard work and achieving results rather than specific titles:

*My primary goal is to continue working hard and achieving results, rather than pursuing specific titles or positions. While I am aware of the gender dynamics in career progression, I focus on maintaining my integrity and work ethic, ensuring that my contributions speak for themselves. My aspiration is to keep contributing meaningfully to my field and inspire others through my dedication and achievements (MMI 2T).*

Participant MMI 3T aspires for continuous growth and making a positive impact on society:

*My career aspirations are centred around constant growth and skill enhancement and to make a positive impact on society (MMI 3T).*

Participant MMI 3A seeks continuous growth beyond her current position of associate professor, despite stress and health challenges:

*Even though I am currently an associate professor, I don't consider myself to have 'arrived' at my ultimate goal. My aspirations extend far beyond my current position, and I continuously seek opportunities for growth. I aim to contribute more significantly beyond my current institution, constantly planning for a broader impact (MMI 3A).*

Participant MMI 4A aims to remain available and ready to serve in any capacity, applying her skills to make a meaningful impact:

*As I continue in my career, my primary aspiration is to remain available and ready to serve in any capacity. My goal is to apply my skills and experiences to make a meaningful impact (MMI 4A).*

Participant MMI 1K wants to reach the highest possible position by continually involving herself in various career and developmental programmes:

*Personally, I want to get to as high as I can get to. Therefore, I keep involving myself in various career programmes, training, and developmental programmes because I don't know where I will get in future (MMI 1K).*

Participant MMI 2K aspires to motivate individuals to push beyond their comfort zones and strives for greater heights in their careers, inspired by accomplished women leaders before her:

*Looking ahead, my aspirations revolve around continuing to serve as a mentor and source of inspiration for others. I aim to motivate individuals to push beyond their comfort zones and strive for greater heights in their careers (MMI 2K).*

Participant MMI 1H aims to learn new things and stay updated with modern technologies to serve as a role model for aspiring young women leaders:

*Looking ahead, I want to learn new things and stay abreast of modern technologies to be a role model for young ladies who also aspire to lead and contribute to the University (MMI 1H).*

The analysis presented above reveals a shared spirit of ambition, purpose, and growth among female leaders in Ghana's technical universities. These women articulate forward-looking aspirations grounded in continuous learning, mentorship, institutional service, and societal impact. Despite differences in roles and career stages, their goals reflect a commitment to advancing both personal and professional development. The above analysis shows that some aim for higher leadership positions or broader influence nationally and internationally, while others prioritize mentoring, reviving community initiatives, or simply remaining relevant in a fast-evolving academic landscape. Their reflections blend humility, resilience, and a deep passion for empowering others, especially young women, to rise and thrive in leadership. Overall, the results illustrate that their aspirations are not self-centered but are deeply intertwined with uplifting others and transforming the technical education environment.

#### **4.3.2. Theme 2: Factors contributing to career progression of women in leadership in the Technical Universities**

This theme aligns with Research Question 2: "What factors contribute to the career progression of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana?" It explores the enablers of women's ascent into leadership roles within Technical Universities. Insights from participant interviews highlighted specific factors that facilitate their career progression in these institutions, such as teamwork, mentorship, Organisational factors, Professional development, and personal and religious factors.

#### **4.3.2.1. Team work/ Attitudes towards work**

Participant MMI 1A emphasized the importance of teamwork and sociability in her career. Her ability to listen and engage with others has been pivotal in her leadership journey.

*What has really pushed my successful career is teamwork and having a listening ear as well as being sociable (MMI 1A).*

Participant MMI 2A echoed this sentiment, adding that her dedication to excellence and openness to mentorship have been critical in her advancement.

*I firmly believe that if something has to be done, it must be done well, without making excuses. My willingness to learn and be mentored has also played a crucial role. These attributes have been fundamental in helping me advance in my career as a woman leader in technical universities (MMI 2A).*

Considering the above, it is vividly apparent that, teamwork, a proactive work ethic, and openness to collaboration emerged as foundational traits enabling career progression among these two female leaders. Participants emphasized the power of being sociable, having a listening ear, and demonstrating dedication to quality work. Their commitment to excellence and receptiveness to feedback fostered mutual respect and cooperation within their institutions. These interpersonal dynamics not only helped them navigate leadership spaces but also strengthened their credibility and influence. The combination of technical competence and positive workplace behaviour was instrumental in building professional trust and leadership momentum.

#### **4.3.2.2. Mentorship and Networking**

Mentorship and networking emerged as crucial elements in the career development of these leaders. The participants highlighted how these factors provided guidance, support, and opportunities. Participant MMI 1A described a pivotal moment when a colleague's recommendation led to a significant training opportunity.

*I remember there was a training programme outside the country, and a colleague registrar of a different technical university drew my attention to it. I applied through VC, and it was successful. The training really helped a lot. Personally, I didn't enjoy much mentorship from the people I worked under; however, most of my mentorship I had was through my networks with other senior colleagues elsewhere (MMI 1A).*

Participant MMI 2A noted how mentors indirectly prepared her for leadership through assigned tasks and how networking facilitated idea exchange and support among colleagues.

*Early on, mentors assigned me tasks and assignments, unknowingly preparing me for leadership roles. Networking with colleagues has also been crucial, as we share ideas and discuss challenges, learning from each other's experiences. These relationships have significantly impacted my career (MMI 2A).*

Participant MMI 1CC shared how mentorship and networking were foundational, with mentors providing essential guidance and networks offering professional insights and support.

*Mentorship has been instrumental in shaping my leadership journey. From seeking advice on professional etiquette to learning the ropes of the job, mentors like my immediate superiors provided invaluable guidance. Networking has been equally impactful, with colleagues at different institutions offering insights and support (MMI 1CC).*

The above narratives as shared agrees with Participant MMI 2CC who shared her networking have significantly influenced her career.

*As a professional administrator, I have been networking with other colleagues for advice and technical support to keep me on as a leader. I look up to others and encourage myself that I can also do it (MMI 2CC).*

Participant 1 MMI 1T also highlighted that network of friends motivated her to aspire leadership positions in Technical University.

*I have a circle of about seven friends with different personalities who support me in various ways. Having a network of people who can provide different types of support—whether emotional, professional, or spiritual—has been essential. Networking has undeniably played a crucial role in my journey (MMI 1T).*

More so, Participant MMI 2T highlighted how networking at a conference led to significant career opportunities, showcasing the transformative power of professional connections.

*While I have not had formal mentorship, networking has been invaluable. For instance, during a conference, I connected with a key figure from an African Union-related Organisation. This interaction led to opportunities such as a ticket to Ethiopia for a program, a chair position on an AU committee, and the chance to lead a significant project (MMI 2T).*

Participants MMI 3T also highlighted how mentorship influenced her successful career in technical university.

*Through my own experience, I've found that mentorship and networking are invaluable for gaining knowledge and skills. They've been crucial for my personal growth, providing career guidance and emotional support. For women, especially, female mentorship offers unique advantages, helping us navigate specific workplace challenges and advance our careers (MMI 3T).*

Similar narratives were shared by MMI 3A

*I completed my PhD in three years thanks to the guidance of a mentor who pushed me out of my comfort zone. His mentorship extended beyond academic guidance; he taught me the importance of persistence and thoroughness. His influence has been so profound that I now strive to mentor others similarly, understanding the value of pushing people to achieve their potential (MMI 3A).*

Furthermore, interview participant 5, 6 and 7 all affirmed diverse ways mentorship and networking have played a pivotal role in their career progression. Their respective narratives shared are presented below;

*Mentorship and networking have been vital in my career. Most of my mentors were men who encouraged me and provided guidance. Networking also played a role, with colleagues encouraging me to apply for leadership positions and advocating for me (MMI 4A).*

*As for me, basically every female leader is a mentor for me. So once I see someone up there I believe I can also get there and with that mindset I put in the measures to also rise up to that place and join them to increase female participation in higher education (MMI 1K).*

*Participating in mentorship programmes has provided me with insights and perspectives from seasoned professionals (MMI 2K).*

Evidence above depicts that, Mentorship and networking stood out as catalytic forces shaping women's leadership pathways. Both formal and informal mentorship especially from senior colleagues provided emotional support, professional guidance, and opportunities that would otherwise remain inaccessible. The results also showed that, networking, particularly with peers and leaders outside their institutions, opened doors to training, leadership roles, and global exposure. These relationships cultivated confidence, broadened perspectives, and enabled strategic career moves. The data highlights that for many women, external networks often compensated for limited internal mentorship, emphasizing the importance of expanding professional communities.

#### **4.3.2.3. Organisational Factors**

Organisational factors play a crucial role in shaping the career progression of female leaders in technical universities. During the interview session, one participant expressed that despite self-funding her career advancements initially, the presence of a staff development committee at the university has now created avenues for staff support. She acknowledged the committee's role even though she did not personally benefit from it:

*Indeed, when I came to the University, I had already self-sponsored most of my career advancements. I remember the University once organized a training programme; however, the bills were footed by me. There is a staff development committee that gives support to staff. I didn't benefit, but it's good that provision has been made now (MMI 1A).*

Another participant highlighted the significance of institutional support, particularly mentioning the sponsorship for postgraduate degree:

*Institutional support has been instrumental in my career advancement. I was sponsored for my master's degree, which positioned me for leadership roles. Additionally, the university's staff development program, offering short courses and professional development opportunities, has been beneficial. These initiatives have provided the foundation for my growth and advancement (MMI 2A).*

A participant emphasized how attending conferences enriched her knowledge, which she then applied in her role, fostering continuous improvement:

*Institutional initiatives, particularly support for attending conferences, have been vital for my career advancement. Each conference attended enriches my knowledge base, which I then apply in my role, ensuring continuous improvement and innovation (MMI ICC).*

Some participants noted that while they did not personally benefit from certain institutional policies, they recognized the importance of programmes like WETED and gender-focused policies that support women's leadership. Despite this, one participant emphasized her belief in proving her capabilities irrespective of gender:

*While I haven't personally benefited from institutional policies or initiatives for career advancement, I recognize that there are programmes like WETED and gender-focused policies that support women's leadership (MMI IT).*

The availability of study leave was another key factor, allowing one participant to pursue her masters degree, which significantly contributed to her career development:

*One influencing factor that has enhanced my career progression is the availability of study leave. It really helped me to pursue Master of philosophy (MPhil) Programme (MMI 3T).*

One participant shared her experience of receiving scholarships for her master's degree and benefiting from an institutional agreement for her Ph.D.:

*I was fortunate to receive a scholarship for my master's degree from my university, which covered the second year of my studies. For my PhD, I benefited from an institutional agreement between my university and another, which selected five candidates from my faculty, including me. These scholarships I received have been invaluable in my academic and professional journey (MMI 3A).*

Also, the creation of new units within the university was seen as a significant enabler for career progression. A participant emphasized the mentoring and encouragement from the Vice-Chancellor:

*Institutional support has been significant, with policies and scholarships for staff development. Our supportive VC has been instrumental in mentoring and encouraging paper submissions (MMI 4A).*

Participant MMI 1K shared similar sentiments:

*The creation of new units, faculties within the university opened doors for some of us to also get these positions. Without them there will be no room for us (MMI 1K).*

Participant ‘MMI 2K’ also shared similar thoughts:

*Institutional initiatives, such as the support provided for my Ph.D. studies, have been crucial in my career advancement. Moreover, the willingness of the institution to support my endeavors, even when resources were limited, has been instrumental in my professional growth (MMI 2K).*

The analysis has brought to light that, institutional structures and support systems significantly influenced women's advancement. Opportunities like scholarships, study leave, conference participation, and leadership development programmes enabled skill acquisition and exposure. Though some participants self-financed their development, they acknowledged institutional provisions such as staff development committees and gender-inclusive policies. Furthermore, structural changes like the creation of new units facilitated leadership openings. Where leadership prioritized equity and development, women experienced notable career gains. Thus, institutional commitment to inclusive policies and resources remains a vital enabler for sustainable female leadership.

#### **4.3.2.4 Commitment to Continuous Learning and Professional Development**

Commitment to continuous learning and professional development emerged as a critical theme in the career progression of female leaders. A participant who has reached the apex of the administrative cadre emphasized her unwavering commitment to continuous learning, underscoring the importance of staying open to new knowledge to navigate challenges effectively:

*Even though I have reached the apex of the administrative cadre, my commitment to continuous learning and professional development is still high. I am still open to learning new things to navigate the challenges I face when discharging my duties” (MMI 1A).*

Another participant highlighted how her dedication to continuous learning empowered her to tackle leadership challenges and advance her career:

*My commitment to continuous learning has been crucial in navigating leadership challenges. I actively seek knowledge, conduct research, and reach out to others for their expertise. Whenever opportunities arise to attend courses or programmes that enhance my skills, I seize them. This dedication to learning has empowered me to tackle challenges effectively and advance in my career (MMI 2A).*

The importance of embracing new technologies and methodologies was emphasized by another participant, who noted that staying relevant requires constant engagement in professional development:

*Commitment to continuous learning is non-negotiable in today's dynamic landscape. I realized earlier that embracing new technologies and methodologies is essential for staying relevant. I always sought to enhance my professional development through constant training and engagement. This not only enhances job performance but also fosters personal growth and resilience in the face of evolving challenges (MMI ICC).*

For one participant, professional development programmes provided valuable insights into current trends in administrative practices, enabling her to perform effectively:

*Through the professional development, I have been able to learn more, especially current trends in administrative practices to continue working effectively as expected (MMI 2CC).*

Balancing work and study were a significant aspect for another participant, who pursued further education while working, using weekends and early mornings for learning:

*Starting as an HND holder, I pursued further education, earning an MBA in Management Information Systems and a second degree in Accounting and Finance. I also participated in various professional courses and continuous professional development (CPD) programmes. Balancing work and study, I utilized weekends and early mornings for learning. This commitment to continuous education has equipped me with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate leadership challenges effectively” (MMI 1T).*

The benefits of observing best practices and learning from different institutions were noted by another participant, who emphasized how these experiences refined her skills and adapted her leadership style:

*Continuous learning and professional development have been fundamental to my career. By observing best practices and learning from different*

*institutions, I have been able to refine my skills and adapt to various challenges. Traveling and engaging with diverse professional environments have provided me with new perspectives and approaches that have shaped my leadership style and enhanced my effectiveness in my roles (MMI 2T).*

Balancing multiple roles while pursuing education was highlighted by another participant, who emphasized the importance of time management and meticulous planning:

*Continuous learning and professional development have been pivotal in my career. Currently, I am a student in a programme that challenges me to balance my duties as a lecturer, leader, and family person. This commitment drives me to persevere and plan meticulously. Time management has become a crucial skill, allowing me to prioritize tasks that directly benefit my professional goals (MMI 3A).*

Another participant shared how continuous learning was essential to avoid being side-lined, highlighting her efforts to earn a Diploma of Education:

*Continuous learning has been essential in overcoming challenges and advancing my career. For instance, I earned a Diploma of Education despite a tight schedule to avoid being side-lined (MMI 4A).*

The need for constant involvement in career advancement programmes was emphasized by another participant, who continually builds herself to keep up with the changing world:

*We are in a dynamic world so you can't stay static. Things keep changing around us so if you don't change then you'll be left behind. So that means that constantly you must be involved in these career advancement programmes professional development programmes so that you advance yourself. I still make conscious efforts to build myself every day to keep up with the changing world (MMI 1K).*

Similar views were shared by Participant MMI 2K:

*My dedication to continuous learning and professional development has been a cornerstone of my career progression. Recognizing that a Ph.D. is just the beginning, I actively seek out opportunities for growth and improvement. Engaging in professional development programmes and seizing opportunities for further education have equipped me with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate challenges and drive change (MMI 2K).*

The results presented demonstrate a relentless pursuit of knowledge and skill enhancement characterized the professional journeys of these leaders. Despite attaining high positions, many participants remained deeply committed to self-improvement through further education, training programmes, and professional certifications. They adapted to changing technologies, learned from diverse

environments, and overcame time constraints through discipline and planning. This drive for continuous growth fostered innovation, resilience, and strategic thinking, marking professional development as not just a means of advancement but a mindset critical for effective leadership.

#### 4.3.2.5. Personal Factors

Personal factors, including values, philosophies, and individual characteristics, have significantly influenced the career progression of female leaders. One participant emphasized the importance of financial independence for women, which has been a guiding philosophy in her career:

*Personally, I believe that every woman should be self-sufficient financially so that she will not be handicapped. This has been my philosophy and has really made me focus, and I always encourage young ladies to aspire to take positions to challenge the status quo and to become financially independent (MMI 1A).*

Another participant highlighted her personal values of hard work, integrity, and support for others, which have profoundly influenced her career:

*My personal values of hard work, integrity, openness, and transparency have profoundly influenced my career. I believe in investing in the next generation and am not afraid to delegate tasks, even if my subordinates can perform better in certain areas. Supporting and nurturing talent is central to my leadership philosophy, and this approach has shaped my career trajectory (MMI 2A).*

Determination was cited as a guiding force by another participant, who shared a personal anecdote demonstrating the sacrifices made for career advancement:

*Determination has been my guiding force throughout my career journey. It's that unwavering will to succeed that propels me forward. In navigating through challenges, sometimes I've had to shed the softer aspects of my personality and adopt a more assertive demeanor to combat instances of bullying or discrimination (MMI 1CC).*

Maintaining a focus on job-related matters and avoiding campus politics was another approach that served one participant well, allowing her to build constructive relationships and minimize conflicts:

*My leadership philosophy centers around focusing solely on job-related matters and avoiding involvement in campus politics. By adhering to this*

*principle, I've maintained a professional demeanor and minimized unnecessary conflicts. This approach has served me well over the years, allowing me to concentrate on my responsibilities and build constructive relationships based on mutual respect and shared goals (MMI 1CC).*

The ability to work under pressure and take on additional responsibilities was highlighted by another participant as a major factor in her career progression:

*My ability to work under pressure, team player and ever ready spirit to take up additional responsibilities has been the major factors that have influenced my career progression” (MMI 2CC).*

Being reserved and trustworthy was seen as an invaluable trait by another participant, especially in her profession as an accountant:

*Preserving secrets and maintaining integrity have helped me greatly in my roles as an accountant and auditor. I believe that being reserved and trustworthy has been a significant attribute in my career progression” (MMI 1T).*

The belief that hard work and integrity lead to success was underscored by another participant, who emphasized the importance of determination and effort:

*My personal values of hard work, integrity, and support for others have significantly influenced my career. I believe that nothing is unachievable with determination and effort. Maintaining good relationships and finding joy in the success of others have been key aspects of my philosophy (MMI 2T).*

Personal values and beliefs guided another participant's career decisions and behaviours, helping her achieve her career goals:

*My personal values, beliefs, and leadership philosophy guided my decisions and behaviour throughout my career. They helped me towards my dream instead of against them (MMI 3T).*

Avoiding negative energy and focusing on positive influences was another strategy shared by a participant, who emphasized the importance of striving for results:

*I attribute my success to my ability to avoid negative energy. I don't waste a second on people who bring bad energy into my life. I keep moving forward, adapting as needed. I strive for results and won't let negative opinions deter me from my work” (MMI 3A).*

Hard work, punctuality, and respect were constant values for another participant, underpinning her effectiveness in leadership roles:

*My core values of hard work, punctuality, and respect have remained constant. These values have underpinned my effectiveness in various leadership roles” (MMI 4A).*

The belief that effort and determination are key to achieving career goals was emphasized by another participant, who shared her proactive approach to career advancement:

*Within the technical education sector, I personally believe that, whatever you want to become, you can if you put in the necessary efforts. In my case, I had to take necessary steps to get here. I believe that, once I set my eyes on something, nothing can stop me (MMI 1K).*

The commitment to treating others with respect and fairness, while upholding standards and regulations, was highlighted by another participant as a guiding principle in her leadership:

*I prioritize treating others with respect and fairness while upholding standards and regulations. This commitment to integrity and equity guides my interactions with colleagues and stakeholders, shaping the culture of collaboration and excellence within the technical education sector (MMI 2K).*

The analysis showed that, individual values such as integrity, hard work, determination, and financial independence emerged as powerful drivers of success. Participants cited personal philosophies that shaped their behaviour, from staying focused and avoiding workplace politics to embracing assertiveness when needed. Traits like emotional resilience, trustworthiness, and goal-oriented attitudes helped them surmount gender biases and institutional challenges. These personal attributes—rooted in self-belief and moral conviction—served as internal compasses, reinforcing their leadership identity and commitment to excellence.

#### **4.3.2.6. Religious Factors and Cultural factors**

Religious beliefs have played a significant role in the career progression of some female leaders. Faith in God and the guidance of religious principles have been pivotal in shaping their leadership philosophies and decision-making processes. One participant emphasized the unwavering role of her faith in God throughout her career journey, believing that God's guidance has directed her path:

*Throughout my career journey my faith in God has been unwavering. Regardless of the challenges I faced, I firmly believe that God's guidance has directed my path and will continue to do so (MMI 2K).*

Another participant highlighted the importance of the "Christ factor" in her career, stressing that being directed and inspired by God is essential for a successful leadership journey:

*Personally, I believe the Christ factor has played a crucial role in my successful career progression. In everything I do, I make sure people see Christ in me. I believe that to be a successful woman leader, you need to be directed and inspired by God. This has guided my leadership philosophy, especially my decision-making tactics. I owe my beautiful career to God (MMI 1H).*

The above analysis showed that, religious conviction served as a profound source of strength and guidance for some female leaders used for the study. The analysis showed that, faith shaped leadership styles, ethical decision-making, and resilience in the face of adversity among some female leaders sampled for the study. This implies that, the belief in divine purpose and moral accountability inspired a sense of mission in their roles. Culturally, the data suggests an evolving narrative where women leaders challenge traditional roles while maintaining respect for communal values.

#### **4.3.3. Theme 3: Challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions in the Technical Universities**

This theme explores the various obstacles that hinder women's advancement into leadership roles within Technical Universities. It aligns with Research Question 3: "What challenges do women in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana face when aspiring to leadership positions?" It captures both structural and cultural barriers as recounted by participants. Participants shared diverse yet intersecting experiences regarding these challenges. The core issues that emerged are presented below:

#### 4.3.3.1. Organisational Challenges

The female leaders frequently encountered Organisational barriers that hindered their professional advancement. One participant highlighted the issue of being bypassed in communication, feeling undermined when her boss chose to relay information directly to her subordinates, thereby disrupting the chain of command:

*Sometimes, your bosses skip you and deal with the subordinates directly. I have encountered situations where I heard certain pertinent information from my subordinates. I felt so bad that my immediate boss would sideline me and deal with subordinates directly, meanwhile, the chain is from the boss, through me to the people under my care. (MMI 1A)*

Another participant mentioned the need to adopt a more assertive and sometimes masculine demeanor to be taken seriously and to ensure career progression:

*Pursuing leadership roles at the university required me to assert myself firmly, sometimes adopting a more masculine demeanor to be taken seriously. Though I didn't face overt gender discrimination, I encountered resistance, especially when advocating for my promotion (MMI 1CC).*

Resistance from colleagues and Organisational politics, often influenced by gender biases, posed significant challenges:

*I encountered several resistances especially, when I got the opportunity to become the second female substantive registrar of my school. Falsehood, lies, and hatred pushed me back but I would say that regardless, I made my mark. (MMI 2CC)*

One participant elaborated on how organisational politics became a challenge while pursuing leadership roles:

*Organisational politics has, at times, negatively affected my career progression, particularly because of gender biases. During an election I contested, my gender was used against me, with some questioning how a woman could be a leader. These challenges have sometimes hindered my advancement, but they have also made me more resilient and determined to prove my capabilities. (MMI 3A)*

Another participant faced hierarchical challenges where seniority and precedence were used to bypass her for positions she had rightfully earned:

*One significant obstacle I face was the intricate hierarchy within the institution, where seniority and precedence determined advancement. Despite my preparation and anticipation, I found myself bypassed for positions I had*

*rightfully earned. While navigating these challenges, I remained steadfast, refusing to compromise my integrity or sacrifice my ambitions. (MMI 2K)*

A practical issue with equipment and support from the Organisation further impacted the work rate and efficiency of another participant:

*Currently, my Risograph machine is not working. I have tried all means to get a new one but to no avail. I even took the machine to Kumasi for repairs. I have gone to the transport unit several times, but they have yet to provide me with an official vehicle to bring the machine back. I have to run to other units to use their machines for high-volume photocopying and printing, negatively impacting my work rates. (MMI 1H).*

The participants' experiences reveal deep-seated Organisational barriers that obstruct women's ascent to leadership in Technical Universities. From being bypassed in communication chains to exclusion from rightful promotions, these challenges highlight a lack of institutional accountability and equitable structures. The testimonies underscore how women must often exert extra effort, adopt assertive personas, or navigate workplace politics to be acknowledged. Moreover, insufficient logistical support, such as faulty equipment and bureaucratic inertia, further marginalize female leaders. These systemic inefficiencies and gender-insensitive practices illustrate how institutional frameworks subtly, yet powerfully, impede women's leadership progression.

#### **4.3.3.2. Cultural and Societal Challenges**

Cultural and societal norms often pose significant barriers for women aspiring to leadership positions. One participant recalled how societal expectations influenced the dynamics within professional settings, often ignoring women's views and contributions:

*Culturally, the society doesn't support women in leadership positions. But now things are evolving. I remember a point where in meetings, they hardly listen to my views all in the name of me being a woman. Sometimes, there would be committee compositions where there are only males. So, I apply emotional intelligence to draw the attention of the VC to balance it with some females whose credentials qualify them to be part. (MMI 1A)*

Another participant spoke about the societal challenges of balancing professional responsibilities with family duties, highlighting how she strategically navigated these barriers:

*As a woman, societal and cultural norms initially questioned my ability to balance work, travel, and family. However, I leveraged my femininity, using relatives for accommodation during travels. Proving my dedication gradually changed attitudes, gaining family support. This taught me to navigate gender-related barriers strategically and assert my capabilities confidently. (MMI ICC)*

A participant in the field of science described how societal and cultural biases had attempted to undermine her confidence and capabilities from an early age:

*Being a woman in the scientific field has subjected me to societal and cultural biases from an early age. Throughout my journey, I've faced attempts to undermine my capabilities and confidence. However, I've stood firm in my beliefs and expertise, refusing to let gender-related barriers hinder my progress. Confidence in my abilities has been my most powerful strategy in overcoming such biases. (MMI 2T)*

Another participant recounted how her previous church's views on gender roles negatively impacted her pursuit of higher education and career advancement:

*In my previous church, the pastor openly opposed the idea of women progressing more than their husbands. He often used the pulpit to criticize women who pursued higher education and career advancement, suggesting they were neglecting their familial duties. This mindset not only discouraged women but also created tension within marriages by promoting outdated gender roles. I ultimately left that church to find an environment where my professional achievements were not seen as a threat. (MMI 3A)*

One participant also refused to accept societal stereotypes and lower expectations for women, leveraging her academic background to challenge these norms:

*Societal norms often dictated lower expectations for women in leadership. However, coming from a male-dominated academic background, I refused to accept these stereotypes. (MMI 4A).*

Cultural norms and societal expectations emerged as formidable barriers, deeply embedded in both professional and personal realms. Women leaders grappled with being overlooked in meetings, questioned for prioritizing careers, or discouraged by religious teachings. These accounts point to a pervasive mindset that undervalues women's capabilities and frames leadership as a male domain. However, participants

also demonstrated resilience and agency, employing emotional intelligence, leveraging support networks, and using education to challenge and reshape cultural narratives. This theme illustrates the dual pressure women face from within the institution and from broader societal structures when striving for leadership.

#### **4.3.3.3. Gender Discrimination**

Gender discrimination manifested in various forms, from being sidelined in favor of male colleagues to having qualifications and competencies questioned based on gender. One participant experienced being bypassed by her boss, who assigned tasks to male colleagues despite her seniority:

*Climbing up, I observed instances where my immediate boss would sideline me and give certain tasks to male colleagues I became senior member before them. I confronted my boss and he said, even though I deserve it, he felt a male senior member could handle it better. (MMI 1A)*

Another participant shared how her qualifications and competence were often questioned due to her gender, and how she responded by focusing on delivering excellent work:

*My qualifications and competence were often questioned due to my gender. I responded by remaining calm and focusing on delivering my best work. By ensuring my contributions were substantial and noticeable, I gradually earned the respect and recognition of my colleagues, overcoming these gender-based doubts. (MMI 2A)*

One participant described a frustrating interview experience where her achievements were questioned simply because she was a woman, and how she asserted her credentials:

*I was fortunate not to face direct challenges to my qualifications based on my gender. However, during an interview, a panel member questioned my achievements because I was a woman. I felt frustrated but stayed composed and asserted my credentials. My confidence won support from other panel members, showing the importance of standing firm against biases. I recognize many women face such challenges. (MMI 1CC)*

Another participant recounted an interview where a female lecturer persistently questioned her master's degrees, compelling her to verify her credentials to prove her qualifications:

*There was an instance during an interview where a female lecturer persistently questioned my master's degrees, causing even the panel to become uncomfortable. I had to insist on verifying my credentials to prove my qualifications. Despite such challenges, I remained confident in my achievements. These experiences reinforced the need to stand firm and rely on objective proof of my competence. (MMI 1T)*

Participants often found their abilities doubted based on gendered assumptions, with one sharing how she faced prejudiced remarks about her background and qualifications:

*While my qualifications and competencies haven't been directly questioned based on gender, I've encountered instances where gender assumptions affected perceptions of my abilities. For instance, during an interview, prejudiced remarks were made about my background and qualifications, assuming I relied on unfair advantages. I responded by demonstrating my merit and challenging such unfounded assumptions, refusing to let biased perceptions define my worth. (MMI 2T)*

Another participant noted that female leaders faced lower or different expectations than their male counterparts, influenced by cultural expectations related to gender:

*Per my experiences over the years, female leaders face lower or different expectation than their male counterparts. Females also deal with cultural expectations related to gender. (MMI 3T)*

For participant MM1 2K, despite not having her qualifications directly questioned, experienced being overlooked for training opportunities and decision-making processes due to her gender:

*I did not really encounter instances where my qualifications or competencies were questioned based on gender. I recall being overlooked for training opportunities and excluded from decision-making processes simply because of my gender. Instead, I confronted these situations head-on, advocating for equal treatment and challenging discriminatory practices (MMI 2K).*

However, one participant attributed her smooth ascent to the top to her strong faith:

*Honestly, I didn't face any gender-related barriers as I climbed to the top. Perhaps it's because of my strong intimacy with God. (MMI 1H).*

The above analysis demonstrates that, Gender discrimination was frequently experienced in subtle and overt forms, from being denied opportunities to having

credentials questioned solely due to gender. The participants' narratives exposed how entrenched stereotypes cast doubt on women's competence, despite equal or superior qualifications. This discrimination was sometimes propagated by both male and female colleagues, reflecting how internalized biases transcend gender lines. However, the stories also reflected a recurring theme of resistance—through excellence, confidence, and advocacy—demonstrating how women navigate and challenge these injustices to claim their rightful place in leadership.

#### 4.3.3.4. Family and Caregiving Challenges

Balancing professional responsibilities with family duties was a recurring challenge among the female leaders. Support from family, strategic planning, and personal resilience were critical in managing these dual roles. One participant shared her strategy of preparing meals in advance and teaching her children to cook to mitigate the impact of her leadership duties on family life:

*I am fortunate to have an understanding and supporting husband. In fact, when I had the opportunity to be a leader, my children were much older. I used to cook and put them in the fridge as well as teach my children how to cook when I am not around. Family and caregiving responsibilities were not much a barrier to me. (MMI 1A)*

Participant MMI 2A emphasized the challenges of balancing work and family, especially when travel was required, and how these experiences fostered creativity and resourcefulness:

*Balancing work and family has been challenging, especially when travel was required for my role. My husband, too, was a busy type, so I had to decide for my children's care. These were difficult moments, but they fostered creativity and resourcefulness in managing both responsibilities effectively. (MMI 2A)*

Also, Participant 'MMI 1CC' detailed how a supportive workplace environment helped her manage the dual responsibilities of work and caregiving, particularly with her daughter's health issues:

*Balancing work and family responsibilities was undoubtedly challenging, especially considering my daughter's health issues. However, I was fortunate*

*to have a supportive workplace environment where colleagues were like family, stepping in to assist when needed. While it wasn't easy, the support I received made it possible to pursue my career aspirations while fulfilling my responsibilities as a parent. (MMI 1CC)*

Another participant recounted her meticulous planning to balance her master's studies, work, and family duties:

*Balancing work and family responsibilities while pursuing leadership roles was a significant challenge. When I was doing my master's, I attended classes on weekends, leaving my children with my mother. Despite the exhausting schedule, I never compromised on my job or my studies. This balancing act required immense effort, but it was necessary to keep progressing in my career. (MMI 1T)*

The role of a woman as a mother and wife was seen as a significant impediment by another participant, who shared how she had to forgo a scholarship due to her familial responsibilities:

*The role of a woman as a mother and wife put a lot of impediment in my pursuit of leadership position. I even had a foreign scholarship to pursue PhD and I could not go due to my cultural role as a mother and wife. Regardless, I defy all odds and my husband was very supportive and really encouraged me to push on in my career. (MMI 3T)*

Another participant described the societal expectation that she handle all childcare duties despite both parents working, highlighting the unfair burden placed on women:

*The challenge begins at home. As a woman, balancing work and family responsibilities can be overwhelming. I close work early, pick up the kids, and manage household tasks, all because I'm the woman. This constant demand can be exhausting, but it's a reality many women face. (MMI 3A)*

The above sentiments were re-echoed by Participant 'MMI 4A'. This is what she also had to say:

*One major challenge was balancing home responsibilities with work duties, especially as a young mother with four children. My husband was often away, so I had to manage everything alone. (MMI 4A)*

Participant 'MMI 1K' also found that balancing work and family responsibilities required constant effort to avoid role conflict, especially with young children demanding her attention:

*Family and caregiving responsibilities were indeed a challenge since my children were young. Sometimes they are demanding for your attention, and work is also demanding for your attention. To me, this one is everyday stuff but I am able to balance to avoid role conflict.*

The above results demonstrate that, the struggle to balance leadership roles with family and caregiving duties surfaced as a common thread among the women. Many described having to make strategic adjustments, such as advanced meal preparation, reliance on extended family, or sacrificing career opportunities like scholarships. These experiences reflect the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities placed on women, even when they hold professional leadership roles. Yet, despite these pressures, participants showcased tenacity and resourcefulness, finding ways to uphold both family obligations and career goals. Their stories illuminate how structural and cultural expectations around caregiving continue to shape women's leadership journeys.

#### **4.3.3.5. Pushback from Colleagues**

Resistance and pushback from colleagues were common experiences among the female leaders. During the interview session, Participant 'MMI 2A' narrated the skepticism she faced about her eligibility for leadership roles and how she overcame it through performance and dedication:

*People often doubted my capabilities, but I let my work prove them wrong. Overcoming these doubts through performance and dedication has been a recurring challenge in my career.*

Another participant described facing resistance when advocating for proposals or initiatives and how she used these experiences as learning opportunities:

*There were moments of resistance and pushback from colleagues and peers, particularly when advocating for proposals or initiatives. Sometimes, despite lobbying for support beforehand, I faced opposition during meetings or discussions. Instead of being discouraged by initial setbacks, I used them as learning opportunities, refining my strategies and proposals before presenting them again (MMI ICC).*

Intimidation, backbiting, and hatred were significant challenges for participant MMI 2CC, who remained undeterred and continued to progress in her career:

*Intimidation, backbiting and hatred by colleagues were my biggest challenge but I am not perturbed but moved on. (MMI 2CC)*

Likewise, participant MMI 2T, also described an atmosphere of envy and jealousy at her university, where colleagues viewed her competence as a threat:

*At this University, there's this pervasive atmosphere of envy and jealousy, where some individuals feel threatened by perceived competence or potential. It's disheartening to witness people undermining or opposing you simply because they view you as a threat to their own standing. Despite these obstacles, I've learned to remain focused and not let such negativity derail my aspirations. (MMI 2T)*

Another participant faced rumors and assumptions about her success being linked to her relationships with male colleagues, which undermined her accomplishments:

*In the workplace, I encounter the perception that a woman's success is often linked to her relationships with male colleagues. If a woman progresses rapidly, it's assumed she has been favored due to her connections rather than her competence. During my career, I've had to address rumors and assumptions about my achievements being attributed to male colleagues rather than my hard work and merit. For instance, when I completed my PhD and swiftly became a professor, it sparked unwarranted gossip, overshadowing the years of effort and dedication I had invested. (MMI 3A)*

Pushback from colleagues was seen as a normal occurrence by participant 'MMI 1K', who learned to navigate and manage these challenges over time:

*Well, pushback from colleagues to me is normal stuff that will happen definitely at any point in time. I met people who tried to push me back. I also met others who shared their ideas and philosophies. It happened all the time but at the end of the day they came to understand who I really am. (MMI 1K)*

This resonates with Participant MMI 2K. This is what she said:

*Resistance and pushback from colleagues, particularly male counterparts, posed significant obstacles to my professional journey. Through persistence and diplomacy, I gradually earned the respect and recognition of my peers, fostering a collaborative environment conducive to shared success. While navigating these challenges, I learned the importance of resilience, assertiveness, and strategic diplomacy in overcoming barriers to progress. (MMI 2K)*

The evidence from above shows that, resistance from peers, often fueled by envy, gender bias, or fear of change, formed another layer of difficulty for aspiring women leaders. Whether through skepticism, backbiting, or open opposition, colleagues often acted as gatekeepers to leadership advancement. These accounts reveal a workplace culture where collaboration is sometimes undermined by rivalry and insecurity. Despite this, the women described turning adversity into growth opportunities—

strengthening proposals, building resilience, and allowing performance to silence doubters. The theme underlines that while professional competence is essential, navigating interpersonal resistance is equally critical for women in leadership.

#### **4.3.4. Theme 4: Opportunities available for women in aspiring for leadership positions in the Technical Universities**

Theme 4 answers Research Question 4: “What challenges do women in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana face when aspiring to leadership positions?” The theme considers the institutional and systemic enablers that support women’s leadership journeys in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. The theme emerged through recurrent narratives that emphasized structured support mechanisms, capacity-building programmes, and evolving Organisational cultures that favour female leadership.

##### **4.3.4.1. Study Leave with Pay**

The study leave with pay policy has emerged as a significant opportunity for female leaders in Ghana's technical universities, providing them with a valuable tool to enhance their academic qualifications and prepare for leadership roles. The participants consistently highlighted how this policy has facilitated their career growth and positioned them for leadership positions. One participant acknowledged the importance of study leave with pay, stating that it allows prospective female leaders to leverage this opportunity to enhance their skills and prepare for leadership roles.

*Personally, I didn't really enjoy much opportunities while pursuing leadership roles in this university. Currently, there are study leave with pay policies that the prospective female leaders can leverage to enhance their skills and prepare them for leadership roles (MMI 1A).*

During the interview session, a participant emphasized the direct impact of the study leave policy on her career.

*One significant initiative I leveraged was the study leave with pay policy. This opportunity allowed me to pursue a higher degree while maintaining my position, enhancing my academic qualifications, and positioning me for leadership roles (MMI 1CC).*

Likewise, Participant ‘MMI 4A’ also acknowledged how study leave policy offered her an opportunity to develop her career advancements;

*I utilized the study leave opportunities provided by the university to further my education. This period allowed me to gain advanced knowledge and skills, which I brought back to the university (MMI 4A).*

This resonated with three Participants; MMI 2T, MMI 3T, and MMI 3A who also shared similar sentiments stressing that, they have enjoyed study leave with pay at respective institutions and that has contributed to a successful career.

The results above have revealed that, the study leave with pay policy stands out as a pivotal institutional support mechanism enabling women in technical universities to enhance their academic credentials while retaining job security. Participants viewed this opportunity as a gateway to upward mobility, offering the flexibility and financial stability needed to pursue higher education. Through this policy, women are better equipped to meet the qualifications often required for leadership positions, and the shared experiences reflect its tangible contribution to their professional development. The consistency in testimonials across participants highlights its central role in facilitating career progression

#### **4.3.4.2. External Partnerships**

External partnerships have been instrumental in advancing the careers of female leaders in technical universities by providing networking opportunities, professional growth, and exposure to international experiences. One participant highlighted how networking and the University MOUs with other countries opened doors for professional development.

*The networking was one of the means that gave us open doors. Also, the university had MOUs with other countries, and we had the opportunity to travel outside. Myself, I attended one in the Netherlands, and it really helped me (MMI 1A).*

Another participant pointed out the financial challenges of participating in career development programmes and advocated for institutional sponsorship to support women's professional growth.

*I identified potential partnerships through networking events and professional associations related to my field. Regrettably, I had to foot most of the bills myself. I think institutions should sponsor career development programmes for women to patronize and equip them for leadership positions in Technical Education (MMI 1CC).*

Additionally, a participant shared her positive experience with the Kosmos Innovation Center program, which enabled her to train female students and eventually secure a leadership position.

*Kosmos Innovation Center (KIC) initiated a programme called 'KIC I get a challenge' here and I was fortunate to be selected as the faculty advisor. We trained students helping them to bring out innovative ideas so that at the end of the day they can be entrepreneurs on their own and through this programme I was able to train female students; some of which have created their own businesses and it was actually through that that I got this current position (MMI 1K).*

From the foregoing, it is evident that, External partnerships is a vital enabler for female leadership advancement, providing not only international exposure but also valuable networking and experiential learning opportunities. Participants shared how institutional collaborations, like MOUs and innovation programmes, opened doors to leadership by enhancing their visibility, credibility, and skill sets. However, the burden of self-funding some of these experiences underscores the need for targeted institutional investment to ensure equitable access. These partnerships are thus double-edged: rich in potential, yet sometimes limited by financial constraints.

#### **4.3.4.3. Evolving Landscape of Technology**

The evolving landscape of technology in education presents new opportunities for women to excel and assume leadership roles. Participants acknowledged the need to

embrace technology and highlighted the benefits and challenges associated with its integration into their professional lives. One participant emphasized the importance of staying abreast with technological advancements, noting that the system has changed and everyone must incorporate technology into their work.

*We, the middle-aged group, need to sit up and be abreast with technology. Now the system has changed, and we all have to humble ourselves to incorporate technology in our work (MMI 1A).*

Another participant discussed how embracing technology, including AI and social media, could create new opportunities for women, stressing the importance of an attitude towards learning and adapting.

*Embracing technology, including AI and social media, has created new avenues for every prospective leader of which women could take advantage of. The key is an attitude towards learning and adapting to technological advancements. Equipping oneself with relevant skills ensures readiness for new opportunities in the evolving educational landscape (MMI 2A).*

Another participant also pointed out the challenges of internet connectivity, which can hinder the full potential of technology in enhancing career progression.

*The integration of digital technologies in education has opened up numerous avenues of which women could leverage and improve on their career progression. However, I think more could be done in terms of internet connectivity (MMI 1CC).*

The results above show that, Technology's transformative role in education is increasingly seen as an equalizer, creating avenues for women to innovate and lead. Participants recognized the importance of adapting to digital trends, including AI and social media, which are reshaping leadership competencies. While enthusiasm for tech adoption is evident, concerns about infrastructural limitations—particularly internet access—highlight the disparity between potential and practical application. Nonetheless, the proactive mindset toward technological engagement among participants indicates a readiness to seize future opportunities, provided systemic barriers are addressed.

#### 4.3.4.4. Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

Diversity and inclusion efforts have significantly improved, creating a supportive environment where women can develop leadership skills and pursue higher roles within technical universities. Participants highlighted various initiatives and policies that promote gender balance and foster a culture of inclusivity. One participant reflected on the minimal diversity and inclusion efforts during her time, noting the progress made in recent years to ensure gender balance in committee membership and leadership positions.

*During my time, things diversity and inclusion efforts were minimal. In the review of our statutes and the committee membership, we ensured that there was a gender balance. I tried my best possible to suggest to management to ensure gender balance in the dean of students' office. Now the University is paving the way for women in more positions (MMI 1A).*

Another participant emphasized the university's committee system, which fosters diversity and inclusion by providing platforms for exposure and collaboration.

*The university's committee system fosters diversity and inclusion by providing platforms for exposure and collaboration. These efforts have created a supportive environment where women can develop leadership skills and pursue higher roles within the institution (MMI 2A).*

More so, a participant highlighted the role of women's associations and mentoring programmes in empowering women and promoting diversity and inclusion.

*We have WITED and then we have other female associations on campus and I personally believe that that helps because for WITED we groom, build, and mentor each other. We do this to empower women to rise to fit this diversity and inclusion effort within the university (MMI 1K).*

The results identified above demonstrates that, efforts to institutionalize diversity and inclusion were viewed positively, with Participants noting significant progress in gender-balanced representation across leadership structures. Participants credited formal policies and informal advocacy—such as revising statutes and establishing gender-inclusive committees—as key factors creating a more welcoming environment for women leaders. Additionally, grassroots initiatives like women's associations provide mentorship and community support. These actions reflect a growing cultural

shift within technical universities toward embracing gender equity in leadership pathways.

#### **4.3.4.5. Career Development Programmes and Advocacy Efforts**

Career development programmes and advocacy efforts play a crucial role in supporting the advancement of women in leadership positions within technical universities. Participants shared their experiences with mentorship, workshops, and institutional support that have significantly contributed to their career progression. One participant recalled receiving an award from women advocates, which motivated her to further engage in women empowerment initiatives.

*I remember way back in 2013 when women advocate awarded me at UCC. The award made me known and motivated me to do more regarding women empowerment (MMI 1A).*

Another participant discussed how empowering female subordinates by delegating tasks and providing guidance has supported the development of women leaders within the university.

*One initiative I implemented was empowering female subordinates by delegating tasks, providing guidance, and creating platforms for them to express their ideas. By building their confidence and competence, I supported the development of women leaders within the university (MMI 2A).*

More so, one participant also highlighted the importance of mentorship and professional development programmes in their career journeys.

*I was fortunate to have many mentors who were instrumental in my career progression, especially when I first started. Currently, many women including myself are encouraging the young ones to apply for leadership roles and provide invaluable advice on how to prepare for these roles (MMI 1CC).*

Participant MMI 3A also identified opportunities through workshops and conferences to enhance her career progression at Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.

The evidence above shows that career development initiatives and advocacy networks were highlighted as critical in nurturing women's leadership potential. Through

mentorship, skills workshops, and recognition from advocacy groups, participants felt encouraged and equipped to pursue higher roles. The narratives emphasize the importance of both institutional support and personal initiative in building confidence and leadership competencies. Empowerment through delegation and mentorship was particularly emphasized as a strategic approach to growing a pipeline of capable female leaders within these institutions.

#### 4.3.4.6. Emerging Fields and Interdisciplinary Programmes

Emerging fields and interdisciplinary programmes are creating new leadership opportunities for women in technical universities. These areas require innovative thinking and diverse perspectives, making them ideal for women to step into leadership roles and drive impactful projects. One participant noted that emerging fields like data science, renewable energy, and biotechnology offer new leadership opportunities, allowing women to lead interdisciplinary initiatives and establish their leadership credentials.

*Emerging fields like data science, renewable energy, and biotechnology, along with interdisciplinary programmes, are creating new leadership opportunities. These areas often require innovative thinking and diverse perspectives, making them ideal for women to step into leadership roles. By leading interdisciplinary initiatives, women can drive impactful projects that address complex challenges, further establishing their leadership credentials (MMI ICC).*

Another participant emphasized how these emerging fields and interdisciplinary programmes foster innovation and inclusivity, empowering women with diverse skills and perspectives to break barriers and inspire future female leaders.

*My journey at this Technical University has shown that when women are equipped with cutting-edge knowledge, they break barriers and inspire future female leaders (MMI 1H).*

The above results have identified that, the Emerging academic and research areas—such as data science, renewable energy, and biotechnology—are creating unique leadership niches for women in technical universities. These fields, often

interdisciplinary in nature, require innovative thinking and diverse perspectives, aligning well with inclusive leadership goals. Participants viewed these domains as fertile ground for women to lead pioneering projects and gain recognition. The intersection of innovation and inclusivity in these areas not only broadens leadership horizons but also offers transformative potential for gender parity in academia.

#### **4.3.5. Theme 5: Barriers Experienced by Women in Leadership Roles in Technical Universities**

This theme encapsulates the structural, socio-cultural, and relational constraints experienced by women in leadership positions within technical universities in Southern Ghana. The theme aligns with Research Question 5: “What barriers do women who have attained leadership positions in Technical Universities report that hinder them in their leadership roles in Ghana?” Through rigorous inductive coding and thematic analysis of the interview data, four critical issues were distilled. These include: Gender-Related Bias, Institutional and Organisational Barriers, Work–Life Integration Challenges, and Cultural and Societal Expectations. Each of these core issues reflects the complex and intersecting dynamics that continue to shape and, in many cases, constrain the leadership trajectories and lived experiences of women in higher education management.

##### **4.3.5.1. Gender-Related Bias**

Gender-related biases present a significant barrier for female leaders, subtly undermining their authority and competence in various ways. Participants discussed their experiences with these biases, which often manifest through stereotypes, derogatory remarks, and doubts about their abilities. One participant acknowledged that gender-related bias is not a significant issue at her institution currently but noted it was more prominent during her climb to leadership.

*In fact, the gender-related bias is not much of a problem here. I faced some climbing up, but when I became the registrar, things have normalized compared to before (MMI 1A).*

Another participant shared how she navigated gender biases by maintaining professionalism and addressing misconceptions directly, which helped her assert her authority and foster inclusion.

*Gender biases and stereotypes often seep into interactions, with derogatory comments like 'that woman' subtly undermining authority and capability. However, I've learned to navigate these challenges by maintaining professionalism and addressing misconceptions head-on. By asserting myself confidently and refusing to accept unjust assumptions, I've carved a path that commands respect and fosters inclusion for women leaders (MMI 1CC).*

Participants 'MMI 1T' shared similar experiences, highlighting the doubts and stereotypes they faced from colleagues who questioned their abilities based on gender.

*Many colleagues, especially men, doubted my abilities purely based on my gender. For instance, there were insinuations that I was given certain opportunities because of favoritism rather than merit. These stereotypes manifested in subtle ways, such as questioning my decisions more rigorously than my male counterparts and making it harder for me to assert my authority. Despite these challenges, I remained steadfast, consistently proving my competence through my work (MMI 1T).*

Participant MMI 2T also shared similar views:

*I once contributed to a discussion, only to be dismissed by a male colleague simply because of my gender. Such incidents can stifle meaningful conversations and collaboration. However, these biases do not intimidate me. I recognize them and find alternative ways to achieve my objectives, bypassing individuals who hold such biases (MMI 2T).*

Regarding Theme 1, the results showed that, Gender-related bias is a persistent and multifaceted barrier for women in leadership, often manifesting through stereotypes, derogatory remarks, and undermining of authority. Despite some participants noting a reduction in overt bias after attaining senior roles, the climb to leadership remains riddled with prejudiced assumptions and microaggressions. These women frequently encounter skepticism about their competence, with their contributions scrutinized more intensely than those of their male counterparts. Nevertheless, many demonstrate resilience by countering these biases with professionalism, factual decision-making,

and a firm assertion of their capabilities, thereby fostering inclusion and gradually shifting perceptions within their institutions.

#### 4.3.5.2. Organisational Barriers

Organisational barriers, including envy from colleagues, systemic obstacles, and the interconnected nature of relationships within the university, pose significant challenges for female leaders. These barriers often manifest subtly, making them difficult to identify and address directly. One participant spoke about the envy she faced from female colleagues and her strategy to stay focused and not respond to every negative comment.

*I see envy among some female staff within the University. Sometimes they throw shades and write certain stuff about me, but I am focused. It's not everything that I am supposed to respond to (MMI 1A).*

Another participant discussed the efforts of some colleagues to undermine her, recognizing that resistance is part of leadership.

*In my leadership role, some colleagues are bent on creating situations to undermine my efforts, making the job more challenging. However, I understood that this kind of resistance often comes with the territory of leadership (MMI 2A).*

One participant highlighted the elusive nature of Organisational barriers, sharing an example where resources were deliberately made unavailable, complicating her role.

*Well, specific barriers in my leadership role within the technical university are often elusive, hidden beneath surface issues. It's not always clear who or what stands as an obstacle. These hidden barriers can hinder progress subtly, making it challenging to identify and address them directly. Consequently, one must remain vigilant and persistent in overcoming these unseen challenges to keep moving forward (MMI ICC).*

Another participant mentioned the challenge of navigating the interconnected relationships within the university, which can affect perceptions and interactions.

*In my leadership role, one of the specific barriers I've faced is the interconnected nature of relationships within the university. When dealing with someone, it's never just that individual; they are often linked to a network of others. This can create a climate of apprehension, where one action could reverberate through a broader group, affecting perceptions and interactions. I strive to maintain professional integrity and ensure that work gets done, regardless of any personal relationships involved. If someone becomes an*

*impediment, I find a way to navigate around them to maintain my effectiveness (MMI 2T).*

Two participants also discussed the challenges of misconceptions and inappropriate assumptions when collaborating with male colleagues.

*As a woman leader, the moment you align yourself with a male counterpart then people raise eyebrows and perceive there's intimacy between the two of you (MMI 3T).*

Participant MMI 2K also had this to say:

*In meetings, some colleagues, particularly professors, seemed to overlook my contributions, prioritizing their own agendas. Despite attempts to engage and follow up, I faced resistance in ensuring my voice was heard and respected (MMI 2K).*

The results prove that Organisational structures and internal politics create subtle but impactful hurdles for female leaders. These include envy from peers, deliberate obstruction of access to resources, and the complexity of navigating intertwined relationships within the university environment. Such barriers are often indirect and covert, making them difficult to confront explicitly. Participants highlighted instances of sabotage, disregard in meetings, and gendered misinterpretations of professional associations. To cope, these leaders employ strategic silence, resilience, and a strong focus on maintaining professional integrity, often choosing to circumvent obstacles rather than confront them directly, thus sustaining their leadership effectiveness despite systemic resistance.

#### **4.3.5.3. Work-Life Balance Constraints**

Balancing work and family responsibilities poses a significant barrier for female leaders, often impacting their career progression and personal well-being. Participants highlighted the challenges of managing both roles effectively and the sacrifices required to meet professional and personal commitments. One participant shared how the demands of her leadership role delayed her PhD and affected her health.

*The work schedules and the responsibility that comes with holding a leadership position actually delayed my PhD. I had to take some time to meet*

*academic deadlines, prepare for meetings, and prepare for work, among other things. It affected my sleeping and my health (MMI 1A).*

Another participant discussed the challenge of balancing deadlines and caregiving responsibilities, emphasizing the need for creative time management.

*Balancing work and family have always been a challenge after attaining my current position. Juggling deadlines and caregiving responsibilities required significant effort and creative time management. Despite these challenges, I found ways to manage both roles effectively, ensuring neither my professional responsibilities nor my family suffered (MMI 2A).*

Another participant also shared their struggles with work-life balance, detailing the personal sacrifices and meticulous planning required to manage both professional and family responsibilities.

*Balancing work and family responsibilities has been one of the toughest barriers. As a director, my role demands a lot of my time, often beyond regular working hours. Simultaneously, I have had to ensure that my family, especially my children, were well taken care of. I often had to forego rest to meet both professional and personal commitments (MMI 1T).*

For Participant 'MMI 3A' Work-life balance is a major barrier that she still faces even after assuming leadership role.

*My PhD thesis delayed as a result of balancing work and family responsibilities (MMI 3A).*

Participant 'MMI 4A' also shared similar viewpoints.

*Although managing these responsibilities alongside my professional duties has been challenging, it has also made me more empathetic and resilient (MMI 4A).*

Another participant mentioned the common challenge of balancing meetings and family duties, highlighting the need for flexibility and effective time management.

*Balancing meetings and family duties is a common challenge. Sometimes, you know, as a leader, they schedule meetings, sometimes impromptu meetings. And then sometimes, they schedule a meeting at a time where I've gone to pick up my kids. Do you not attend the meeting and go and pick up your kids or you find someone? So sometimes it becomes a little challenging, but I manage it all the time (MMI 1K).*

The data have shown that, Balancing the demands of leadership with family obligations poses a formidable challenge for many women, frequently affecting their health, academic progress, and overall well-being. The narratives reveal how impromptu work demands, frequent travel, and caregiving responsibilities often clash,

forcing difficult trade-offs. Participants shared how their pursuit of further education was delayed and how their family roles required meticulous planning and sacrifice. Yet, through creative time management, empathy, and persistence, these women strive to meet both professional and personal expectations, underscoring the emotional labour and gendered expectations that continue to shape women's leadership journeys.

#### **4.3.5.4. Cultural and Social Expectations**

Cultural and social expectations in Ghana often dictate that leadership roles are male-dominated, particularly in technical fields. Incredibly, one participant pointed out the cultural bias that assumes leadership roles are male-dominated, making it challenging for women to ascend to higher positions.

*Cultural expectations in Ghana often dictate that leadership roles are male-dominated, particularly in technical fields. This cultural bias makes it challenging for women to ascend to higher positions. Many still hold the belief that women are less capable of handling leadership roles, which has led to resistance and a lack of support from both male and female colleagues (MMI 1T).*

The results presented above have shown that Cultural norms and societal perceptions in Ghana significantly shape the leadership experiences of women, especially in technical domains traditionally seen as male-dominated. These ingrained beliefs often position women as less capable or unsuitable for leadership, leading to skepticism and resistance from both male and female colleagues. The prevailing notion that leadership is a male preserve limits opportunity and hinders institutional support for women. Despite this, women leaders persist, challenging cultural stereotypes and asserting their right to lead. Their lived experiences reveal the enduring influence of patriarchal structures and the slow pace of cultural transformation within academic institutions.

#### **4.3.6. Theme 6: Institutional Strategies for Addressing Barriers Faced by Women Aspiring to Leadership in Technical Universities**

This theme aligns with Research Question 6: “What strategies have Technical Universities implemented to address the challenges women face when aspiring to leadership positions?” The theme was derived through a systematic analysis of interview transcripts, in which recurring patterns and phrases were coded to identify institutional efforts to support women’s leadership advancement. Participants' narratives consistently pointed to policies, programmes, or the absence thereof to mitigate gender-related barriers. The coding process highlighted five core sub-issues: gender advocacy centers, mentorship/sponsorship programmes, specialized training, industry collaboration, and peer support networks. The emergence of these sub-themes was based on the frequency and emphasis participants placed on institutional mechanisms, or lack thereof, that influence women's leadership trajectories.

##### **4.3.6.1. Centre for Gender Advocacy**

The establishment of gender advocacy centers in technical universities is a notable strategy aimed at addressing the challenges women face in leadership.

During the interview session, Participant ‘MMI 1A’ highlighted that there is a gender diversity policy in place to address gender disparities:

*There is a gender diversity policy in place. The policy seeks to address gender disparities in Technical Universities (MMI 1A).*

Another participant emphasized the implementation of a gender mainstreaming policy which aims at ensuring a fair playing field for both men and women:

*We have implemented a gender mainstreaming policy aimed at ensuring a fair playing field for both men and women. The policy aims to provide equal opportunities based on capability and merit, fostering a more inclusive environment for all (MMI 2A).*

More so, several participants noted the presence of a Center for Gender Advocacy, which actively fights inequality and provides a supportive environment:

*One significant strategy established by this university to address the challenges women face in leadership is the establishment of the Center for Gender Advocacy. This center focuses on creating a supportive environment for women by advocating for gender equality and providing resources and training to help women navigate the obstacles they face in their professional journeys (MMI 1T).*

Additionally, some technical universities celebrate women and organizes programmes during International Women's Day to highlight their importance and achievements:

*We have the Center for Gender and Advocacy and then we have policies in place. We have sexual harassment policy there. We have other policies that protect women. We celebrate women. So all these programmes go on and you know, for our institution, women are the most important and we are really protected (MMI 1K).*

Despite these efforts, some technical universities still lack targeted initiatives. One participant from mentioned the absence of specific strategies for aspiring women leaders:

*As far as I can remember, there haven't been any specific initiatives or strategies exclusively targeting women aspiring for leadership positions at my school. While some women have managed to break through, the overall landscape remains male-dominated (MMI 2CC).*

Another participant also mentioned the introduction of a sexual harassment policy but questioned its effectiveness:

*Policies and Organisational changes aimed at mitigating gender bias are scarce. While a sexual harassment policy was introduced, its effectiveness remains questionable, with some women opposing its implementation (MMI 1CC).*

The results regarding the first theme demonstrated that, the establishment of gender advocacy centers in technical universities reflects a proactive institutional commitment to promoting gender equity in leadership. These centers serve as platforms for policy implementation, awareness campaigns, and institutional celebrations such as International Women's Day, which collectively aim to uplift women and confront systemic biases. However, the effectiveness and uniformity of these initiatives vary widely across institutions. While some universities boast robust

gender mainstreaming policies and supportive environments, others lack targeted programmes entirely, exposing a gap between policy intent and institutional practice.

#### **4.3.6.2. Mentorship and Sponsorship Programmes**

Mentorship and sponsorship programmes are essential for career development and leadership aspirations. Participant ‘MMI 1A’ opined that there is a policy governing sponsorship programmes that women can apply to, although there is room for expansion:

*As for sponsorship programmes, there is a policy governing it of which women could apply to advance their careers. However, the university could do more and expand its scope (MMI 1A).*

Moreover, mentorship does not distinguish by gender, offering opportunities to all young lecturers:

*Our approach to mentorship doesn't distinguish by gender; young lecturers, regardless of gender, are paired with senior colleagues for mentorship. Additionally, we have policies to support those who qualify for sponsorship programmes. The field is open, and anyone willing to take advantage of these opportunities can achieve their career and leadership goals (MMI 2A).*

In contrast, some technical universities lack formal mentorship and sponsorship programmes specifically designed for women. One participant pointed out that while mentorship programmes exist, they aren't gender-specific, leaving aspiring female leaders without tailored support:

*Formal mentorship and sponsorship programmes for women in technical universities are virtually non-existent. While mentorship programmes exist, they aren't gender-specific, leaving aspiring female leaders without tailored support (MMI ICC).*

Another echoed this sentiment, noting that efforts have been largely individual and informal:

*I've never encountered formal mentorship or sponsorship programmes specifically designed for women within the technical education sector. It's been more about individual efforts and informal networking (MMI 2CC).*

During the interview session, it emerged that, while mentorship and sponsorship programmes exist, their effectiveness remains in question. One participant expressed uncertainty about the impact of these initiatives:

*At my University, while mentorship and sponsorship programmes are designed to support women's career growth and leadership aspirations, their effectiveness remains questionable. It's uncertain whether these initiatives are genuinely impactful or if other factors are at play. We have yet to see substantial results from these programmes, suggesting a need for more robust and effective implementation (MMI 2T).*

Another mentioned that although there are no clear-cut policies regarding mentorship, higher-positioned women try to mentor others:

*There are no clear-cut policies in place regarding mentorship initiatives in the University. However, in most cases, women who have attained higher positions try their best to mentor those under their care. The mentoring process depends on the mentor and the mentee (MMI 1H).*

Considering the above, the data showed that Mentorship and sponsorship programmes represent critical mechanisms for supporting women's professional growth, yet their implementation in technical universities is inconsistent. Where policies exist, they are often gender-neutral and lack the specificity needed to address women's unique leadership challenges. Many women rely on informal mentorship and personal networks, which can limit access and sustainability. Participants acknowledge the potential of these programmes but call for structured, gender-sensitive approaches that provide clear pathways for career advancement and cultivate female leadership within the academic environment.

#### **4.3.6.3. Specialized Training, Skill Development, and Leadership Programmes**

Specialized training and skill development programmes tailored to women can significantly enhance their leadership capabilities. However, many technical universities lack such targeted initiatives.

At my university, there are no specialized training programmes for aspiring women leaders, and there's a call for the inclusion of such programmes:

*As far as I am concerned, in my University, they don't really have any specialized training that is tailored to the unique needs of aspiring women leaders. I think technical universities in general could consider bringing some on board. Currently, I'm in talks with other stakeholders to establish a female engineering students association to empower women to pursue leadership positions (MMI 1A).*

Another participant confirmed that training programmes are designed to benefit everyone equally, without specific tailoring for women:

*Our training and skill development programmes are designed to benefit everyone equally and are not specifically tailored to women. We ensure that these programmes provide valuable skills and leadership development opportunities to all participants, helping them advance in their careers regardless of gender (MMI 2A).*

One participant admitted that, the absence of specialized programmes is more pronounced.

*Specialized training, skill development, or leadership programmes tailored to women's unique needs are notably absent in technical universities. This lack of targeted support exacerbates existing gender disparities in leadership. Without access to specialized programmes, women face additional barriers in skill development and leadership training, hindering their professional advancement (MMI ICC).*

Another noted the lack of opportunities for aspiring women leaders:

*This University haven't offered specialized training or leadership programmes exclusively for aspiring women leaders. We've had to seek external opportunities by ourselves (MMI 2CC).*

Similar sentiments were shared by Interview Participant 'MMI 4A'.

*Currently, there are no specialized training, skill development, or leadership programmes specifically tailored to the unique needs of aspiring women leaders in these technical universities (MMI 4A).*

Nonetheless, the available programmes help enhance professional skills and support career advancement for all employees:

*While there might not be specific training tailored exclusively for aspiring women leaders, technical universities offer comprehensive leadership programmes accessible to all. Regardless of gender, once assuming leadership roles, individuals are entitled to participate in relevant training opportunities. This ensures a level playing field where skill development and capacity building are accessible to all office-holders, irrespective of gender (MMI 2K).*

Drawing from the above, the results showed that, the lack of specialized training and leadership development programmes tailored to women stands out as a major

shortcoming in technical universities. While general training opportunities are available, they often fail to account for gender-specific barriers that hinder women's progression into leadership roles. This omission reinforces existing inequalities and leaves aspiring women leaders underprepared for the demands of leadership. The call for targeted interventions, such as female-focused training workshops and leadership pipelines, reflects a growing awareness of the need for systemic change to empower women more effectively.

#### **4.3.6.4. Collaborative Efforts with Industries**

Collaborations with industries can provide valuable opportunities for professional growth and leadership development. However, these collaborations often lack a focus on women aspiring for leadership roles. Interview Participant 'MMI 1A' hinted that, industry collaborations are more generic and not focused on leadership aspirations for women:

*My University has more collaboration with industries, but it's not focused on women aspiring for leadership positions. It's a more generic collaboration where our students could do internship programmes (MMI 1A).*

Also, Participant MMI 2CC noted similar issues, highlighting missed opportunities in industry collaborations:

*Collaboration between universities and industry partners rarely focuses on creating pathways for women in leadership. It's a missed opportunity (MMI 2CC).*

Conversely, one participant hinted that, female associations like Women in Technical Education and Development (WITTED) have been effective in creating networks of support for women in technical fields:

*One effective initiative here is the formation of female associations like Women in Technical Education and Development (WITTED). These associations create a network of support and solidarity among women in technical fields. They provide opportunities for networking, mentorship, and professional development tailored to the unique challenges women face (MMI 1T).*

Participant 2 also shared similar narratives.

*One notable policy aimed at creating a more inclusive environment for women is related to sexual harassment. A committee was formed to address this issue, and I was part of it. This committee worked on developing policies to combat sexual harassment within the university. This Organisation has been instrumental in promoting gender equity and mitigating biases in technical universities and polytechnics (MMI 2T).*

The above results show that, Industry collaboration is a promising yet underutilized avenue for fostering women's leadership in technical universities. Existing partnerships tend to focus broadly on internships and student development without integrating gender-specific leadership opportunities. However, some progress is evident through initiatives like WITTED and committees addressing sexual harassment, which contribute to building supportive environments for women. Despite these efforts, the absence of strategic, gender-focused collaboration with industry partners remains a missed opportunity to bridge academia and leadership pipelines for women in technical fields.

#### **4.3.6.5. Peer Support Networks**

Peer support networks can provide invaluable assistance and encouragement for women aspiring to leadership roles. However, such networks are often lacking in technical universities. One participant opined that, there are no formal peer support networks for women aspiring for leadership positions:

*Currently, there are no formal peer support networks or forums for women aspiring for leadership positions. The peer support available is for students (MMI 1A).*

Also, one participant highlighted the absence of formal peer support networks, relying instead on informal connections:

*Peer support networks or forums for aspiring women leaders are virtually non-existent within technical universities. As far as I know, existing initiatives often target broader demographics, neglecting the unique challenges faced by women in technical fields (MMI 1CC).*

Another Participant noted the lack of specific peer support networks within the university:

*Well, women leaders rely on informal connections to navigate their leadership journeys. No formal peer support networks are in place at this University (MMI 2CC).*

Participant MMI 2T also expressed similar concerns:

*I'm not aware of any specific peer support networks or forums within the technical universities that facilitate women sharing experiences and insights. However, DAAD has organized events bringing women from various universities across Africa to share experiences and support each other. These gatherings, held a few times over the years, have provided valuable platforms for women to discuss and overcome challenges, though they are not specifically linked to the technical universities (MMI 2T).*

Drawing from the above, it is evident that, Peer support networks are vital for sharing experiences, building confidence, and fostering resilience among women pursuing leadership. Unfortunately, formal peer support structures for aspiring women leaders are largely absent in technical universities. Participants rely heavily on informal networks or external initiatives, such as DAAD events, to find solidarity and encouragement. This gap highlights the need for institutions to facilitate structured forums and communities that empower women through mutual support, experience-sharing, and collaborative problem-solving, ultimately strengthening their leadership trajectories.

### **5.1 Focus Group Discussion**

This section presents empirical insights derived from two focus group discussions (online focus groups), comprising a total of twelve participants who concurrently hold leadership positions within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. The online focus groups were conducted via virtual conference calls, and the sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent. Although online formats limited access to non-verbal cues such as facial expressions or body language, the

researcher remained attentive to vocal tone, hesitations, and conversational turns to capture contextual subtleties. Data were transcribed verbatim, coded systematically, and analysed iteratively to ensure analytical depth and thematic coherence. The researcher played the role of a moderator facilitating from participant contributions.

Each group consisted of six purposively selected participants, two key officers, two senior management members, and two registrars, who had also participated in the preceding semi-structured interviews. This purposive homogeneity facilitated a collegial yet diverse exchange of perspectives, enhancing data richness and credibility (Krueger & Casey, 2015). To ensure confidentiality and adhere to ethical protocols as stipulated by Creswell (2013) and the Belmont Report, all participants were anonymized using alphanumeric identifiers (FG = Focus Group, MM = Management Member, KO = Key Officer, R = Registrar).

All participants were married and possessed advanced academic qualifications ranging from MPhil to PhD. Additionally, each respondent had over 15 years of professional experience, ensuring an expert-informed discourse grounded in practical and institutional knowledge. The discussions were guided by a semi-structured protocol and conducted in a conducive, non-hierarchical setting to promote free expression and mitigate social desirability bias. Table 3 presents a detailed demographic summary of the focus group participants. The inclusion of focus groups alongside individual interviews enhanced triangulation, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness and interpretive validity of the study's findings (Patton, 2015).

**Table 3: Background information of participants in Focus Group 1**

Participant	Marital	The highest education level	Work Experience
FG1-M1	Married	Ph.D	32
FG1-M2	Married	Ph.D	26
FG1-KO1	Married	M.Phil	18
FG1-KO2	Married	M.Phil	20
FG1-R1	Married	Ph.D	35
FG1-R2	Married	M.Phil	26

Source: Field survey, 2025

**Table 4: Background information of participants in Focus Group 2**

Participant	Marital	The highest education level	Work Experience
FG2-M1	Married	Ph.D	27
FG2-M2	Married	Ph.D	36
FG2-KO1	Married	M.Phil	32
FG2-KO2	Married	Ph.D	20
FG2-R1	Married	Ph.D	25
FG2-R2	Married	M.Phil	18

Source: Field survey, 2025

## 5.2. Thematic Analysis of the Focus Group Discussions

The results and analysis of focus groups focus on the group dynamics and interactions among participants in order to investigate how participants expressed and shared their ideas. The discussion guide was organized around six key thematic domains discussed below.

### 5.2.1. Theme 1: Career Progression of Women in Leadership in Technical Universities

The first theme explores the lived experiences of women's career progression within the context of Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. Participants in

Focus Group 1 described their career progression as gradual, non-linear, and demanding more than what is required of their male counterparts. The women in this group, all of whom held PhDs or MPhils and had over 15 years of professional experience, emphasized the need to consistently prove themselves in leadership circles historically dominated by men.

One participant had this to say:

*I did not just walk into leadership; I had to earn every inch of space I now occupy... and I still have to justify my presence.*

Another participant added:

*There were many moments I felt overlooked—not because I lacked competence, but because the assumption was that a man would be more assertive or decisive.*

Interestingly, a sense of collective endurance was observed in the reflections shared.

Another participant emphasized the interplay of internal ambition and external perception:

*You cannot afford to be mediocre as a woman in this space. You have to be exceptional all the time. Even when you're exhausted.*

A participant linked her progression to higher academic qualification and publication visibility:

*Completing my PhD opened doors for me, but it was not automatic. It took another four years of fighting for recognition before I was nominated to lead.*

This group also emphasized how leadership journeys were often shaped by role models and invisible support networks:

*It was a senior colleague who kept pushing me to apply for leadership roles. Without her, I would have stayed in my comfort zone. (FG1-R2)*

The dialogue in Focus Group 2 reinforced and nuanced the insights from the first group. While participants equally acknowledged the slow and challenging nature of their career progression, they also cited emerging institutional reforms and gender mainstreaming as partial enablers. Notably, three participants mentioned participation in national capacity-building programmes and fellowships designed for women leaders.

A participant reflected:

*In the early 2000s, we were practically invisible. But recent years have seen some policy shifts—though implementation is still slow.*

Another participant, who recently ascended to a strategic position, shared:

*I had to act in the role for over a year before I was confirmed. I kept asking: would a man be made to wait this long?*

There was also a sense of generational change influencing career trajectories as one participant stated:

*Younger women entering academia today are seeing more examples of female leaders. That visibility changes the narrative, even if only slightly.*

Importantly, some participants highlighted their own agency in shaping their progression:

*I intentionally took on roles that stretched me. I volunteered for committees, attended leadership training... I was building my own CV, brick by brick. (One of the participants reiterated)*

Others drew attention to the tension between ambition and the internalized gender expectations that can delay assertiveness in women:

*It took me a while to say, 'I am ready,' even when others believed I was. I think many of us suffer from quiet doubt. (A statement from the focus group discussions).*

Across both groups, participants described career progression as a contested, labor-intensive journey marked by resilience, academic rigor, and mentorship. A hermeneutic interpretation underscores the existential tension between personal drive and institutional barriers. Leadership for these women is not just a position, but a negotiated identity—shaped by socio-cultural context, institutional politics, and evolving self-understanding.

## **5.2.2. Theme 2: Factors Contributing to Career Progression of Women in**

### **Leadership in Technical Universities**

This theme delves into the underlying enablers that have facilitated the upward mobility of women in leadership roles within Ghana's Technical Universities.

Participants in the first focus group attributed their progression to a deliberate pursuit of higher academic qualifications. A participant in the first focus group shared:

*The moment I completed my doctorate, the atmosphere changed. I began to be consulted more... not just as a woman, but as an academic leader.*

Another supported this by stating:

*No one can question your place at the table when you have the highest academic title. It gives you a certain authority, especially in a space where male dominance is still prevalent.*

Mentorship, especially from senior female academics, emerged as a second pillar of progression.

Another recalled:

*My mentor helped me navigate the unspoken rules—when to speak, how to respond, even how to write my application for a leadership post.*

Another participant in the same focus group discussions emphasized sponsorship, distinct from mentorship:

*I had people in high positions who didn't just advise me; they mentioned my name in rooms I wasn't in. That's what opened doors.*

Strategic engagement in institutional activities also featured prominently. Several participants actively sought committee roles and administrative responsibilities to raise their visibility.

For example, a participant explained:

*I accepted responsibilities others saw as burdens. I saw them as stepping stones.*

Family support was another thread, with participants citing spousal and extended family involvement in domestic life as enablers.

A participant mentioned:

*My husband has been supportive from the start. Without that, I would never have been able to handle work and school simultaneously.*

Similar issues emerged in the second Focus Group, though the emphasis shifted slightly toward personal agency and institutional reform. Participants spoke of taking control of their growth and strategically positioning themselves for leadership.

Another explained:

*I enrolled myself in every leadership workshop I could find, even outside Ghana. You have to invest in yourself.*

A participant in the group credited her growth to a proactive personality:

*I ask questions, I volunteer, I lead initiatives. Leadership does not come to those who are passive.*

Participants also discussed mentorship in terms of gender solidarity. One of them remarked:

*There's a quiet sisterhood among women in academia. We pass along lessons that are not written in any policy manual.*

In this group, several participants highlighted institutional gender policies—though inconsistently applied—as contributory.

An example is as follows:

*There are now quotas for women on some committees. While symbolic, they create exposure and eventually credibility.*

The role of familial and emotional scaffolding again featured prominently.

As another noted:

*Having a supportive spouse and domestic help was critical. Without that backing, career progression for married women becomes impossible.*

A participant added:

*My children are grown now, but in the early years, my mother moved in to help. It takes a village.*

Considering the above, it is worth noting that the factors contributing to women's career progression are multilayered and intersubjective. It is vividly apparent that, while academic qualifications provide formal recognition, their true value is shaped within the lived realities of professional life, where relational networks, gendered expectations, and institutional structures determine how such credentials are acknowledged, contested, or diminished. Mentorship and sponsorship stand out as

lifelines that guide women through opaque bureaucratic processes. Institutional participation emerges not just as a performative act but as a strategic choice to render oneself visible in decision-making spaces. Equally, family support represents the often-invisible infrastructure sustaining women in leadership.

The narratives suggest that women leaders in technical universities draw upon both personal resources and relational capital to overcome gendered exclusions. As these experiences unfolded across both focus groups, it became evident that progression is not a matter of chance but of deliberate orchestration of professional and personal capacities within a system that often remains unwelcoming to women.

### **5.2.3. Theme 3: Challenges Women Face When Aspiring for Leadership Positions in Technical Universities**

This theme explores the lived challenges encountered by women as they navigated the path to leadership within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. In Focus Group 1 Discussion, participants spoke passionately about institutional cultures that remain resistant to female leadership. Gender stereotyping was a recurring topic.

One of the participants stated:

*People assume that women are too emotional or too soft to handle complex institutional decisions. You have to work twice as hard to dispel that.*

This perception was echoed by a participant in the first group:

*When I voiced strong opinions, I was called aggressive. But when a man does the same, he's seen as decisive.*

Participants noted that male colleagues often formed informal alliances that excluded women from strategic discussions or recommendations for promotions.

For example, a participant explained:

*Decisions are sometimes made in corridors or during 'old boys' conversations where we are not present. You only hear about it after the fact.*

Another barrier identified was the lack of transparent leadership recruitment processes.

Another group member from focus group 1 shared:

*Leadership appointments are often about who knows whom. You may have the qualifications and experience, but still get bypassed. Work-life balance tensions, especially in earlier career stages, were also noted.*

Another reflected:

*Raising a young family while trying to build a career was extremely difficult. There were days I almost quit.*

Lastly, internal psychological barriers emerged as one member in the group confessed:

*There were times I second-guessed myself, even with all my qualifications. You begin to wonder if you belong in that space.*

Participants in Focus Group 2 reinforced these challenges but provided additional nuance, especially around covert institutional resistance as a member shared:

*You may be nominated for a leadership position, but suddenly, subtle obstacles arise—delayed processes, altered eligibility criteria, or lack of communication.*

Another also drew attention to the isolation female leaders often experience:

*You enter the boardroom and find you're the only woman. You start to doubt your voice, your relevance, and your decisions.*

Gendered expectations in domestic roles remained a constraint as a group member in reflected:

*We are expected to perform perfectly at home and at work. But when leadership demands extra hours, the trade-offs are judged more harshly for women.*

A significant point of discussion was how women are penalized for ambition.

For example, one of them explained:

*If a woman aspires too visibly, it is perceived as arrogance. But ambition is celebrated in men.*

Self-doubt again featured prominently. Another group member said:

*I had to unlearn the idea that I needed to be 'ready' in every sense before putting myself forward. That's not the standard men are held to.*

Participants also cited a lack of female role models in leadership, which limited early visioning. For example, one of the participants reiterated:

*Until recently, I had no female superior to look up to. That absence makes you question whether it's even possible.*

Hermeneutically, these narratives reveal that challenges to women's leadership in Ghanaian technical universities are not merely structural—they are deeply experiential and embodied. Gender stereotyping, informal exclusion, and gatekeeping mechanisms function not only to delay women's ascent but to erode their self-perception and professional confidence. The women's accounts show a strong awareness of the asymmetrical expectations placed upon them. Leadership requires not only competence but also resilience in the face of symbolic and material resistance. Despite institutional rhetoric on equity, the lived experience remains that of navigating a masculinized leadership terrain with insufficient structural and emotional support. The challenges shared across both focus groups demonstrate how systemic inequalities are perpetuated through both policy silences and cultural practices. Yet, through their testimony, these women also assert agency by naming and resisting these challenges, suggesting the emergence of new discursive spaces for future female leaders.

#### **5.2.4. Theme 4: Opportunities Available for Women Aspiring for Leadership**

##### **Positions in Technical Universities**

This theme investigates the enablers and emerging opportunities that women have identified and leveraged in their leadership trajectories within Ghana's Technical Universities. While earlier themes have highlighted structural and socio-cultural impediments, this theme interprets how participants locate and engage with openings, whether through policy shifts, international networks, gender-focused initiatives, or changing Organisational attitudes. The data underscore how opportunity is not simply given but often constructed by women through strategic awareness, resilience, and advocacy. Participants in FG1 acknowledged a gradual shift within institutional

structures that now offer, albeit limited, opportunities for female leadership development. Governmental gender equity policies and the increasing visibility of women in tertiary education leadership roles were cited as opening new doors.

One of the participants in the first focus group explained:

*The new gender policy frameworks from the Ministry of Education have created visibility. They may not be fully enforced yet, but they open the conversation.*

Another emphasized the value of gender-focused training and leadership programmes:

*I was selected for a Commonwealth-funded leadership seminar. That exposure changed my mindset and connected me to powerful networks.*

Participants also noted that institutional gender committees and advocacy platforms, though still developing, were beginning to shift campus cultures. For example, a participant shared:

*Now we have gender desks and committees where women can raise issues that were previously swept under the rug. That wasn't there ten years ago.*

Access to global conferences and virtual training opportunities, especially post-COVID, emerged as another enabling factor. Another participant remarked:

*Virtual platforms have allowed me to attend leadership training I couldn't have joined physically. That's where I met a mentor from Canada who really shaped my approach.*

Finally, a growing solidarity among women leaders was seen as a promising development.

A participant in the group stated:

*We are beginning to form informal support groups, WhatsApp groups, shared readings, and encouragements—these networks really matter.*

The focus group 2 participants reinforced these points, but they also drew attention to specific university-led initiatives that have begun to support women's advancement.

For example, a participant in this group said:

*Our university recently started a mentorship initiative that pairs junior female staff with women in senior positions. I've mentored three women through it.*

Others highlighted that some leadership positions are now openly advertised rather than filled through internal nomination, thereby creating greater transparency as another participant explained:

*For the first time, the Deputy Director role was advertised publicly. I applied, and I got it. That wouldn't have happened five years ago.*

Changing societal attitudes toward women in leadership also emerged as a factor.

For example, a member in the present group reflected:

*There is a growing public discourse about women leading. It's in the media, in our student debates, even in university policy forums.*

Another also described how visibility itself becomes an opportunity:

*Once people see a woman in a leadership role performing competently, it changes minds, and creates room for others to rise.*

Opportunities for external collaboration and research funding targeted at female academics were also discussed.

For example, one participant in the second focus group said:

*I recently led a project funded by an international gender equity grant. The visibility and networks that came with it led to further leadership invitations.*

Considering the above, it becomes evident that opportunities for women in leadership are not merely institutional allowances. They are lived openings shaped by individual navigation, social transformation, and policy evolution. A critical insight across both groups is that the landscape is shifting—not always evenly, but meaningfully. The participants do not describe themselves as passive recipients of progress but as active agents shaping the terms of their visibility and credibility. They demonstrate a dual capacity to recognize institutional levers and to amplify them through personal and collective action.

The data suggest that while formal opportunities such as mentorship programmes, leadership training, and open recruitment are vital, it is the combination of institutional shifts and communal solidarity that makes these opportunities sustainable. Furthermore, the increasing normalization of female authority, through

visibility, success, and strategic networking, emerges as both a present reality and a future promise.

### **5.2.5. Theme 5: Barriers Experienced by Women in Leadership Roles in Technical Universities**

This theme delves into the persistent and structural barriers that women encounter after ascending to leadership roles in Ghana's Technical Universities. Unlike earlier stages of career progression where aspirational barriers predominate, this theme captures the experiential complexities of being in leadership as a woman where gendered expectations, systemic resistance, and institutional inertia continue to shape professional life.

In the first focus group, the participants expressed that occupying leadership roles did not immunize them from exclusion, surveillance, or institutional resistance. Several participants spoke to the paradox of formal authority and informal marginalization.

For example, one person shared:

*Even in a current role, I still get questioned over decisions that would never be challenged if made by a male colleague. It's subtle but persistent.*

Another described resistance from subordinates:

*Some male staff simply refuse to take instructions. They delay tasks, question instructions repeatedly, and it's a form of passive sabotage.*

This resistance extended beyond staff to senior colleagues, as another participant explained:

*You walk into a council meeting and realize decisions were pre-discussed without your input. Your presence is symbolic, not influential.*

Another also offered a powerful metaphor:

*It feels like you're sitting at the table, but not eating—not partaking in real decision-making.*

Participants also noted that performance expectations are often gendered and unrealistic.

For example, a participant in the first focus group stated:

*We are expected to be nurturing, competent, composed, and endlessly available. Any deviation is judged harshly.*

Workplace isolation and the absence of support networks also featured prominently.

One commented was:

*As a woman, you're isolated in leadership. There's no safe space to vent or ask for help without being seen as weak.*

The members of the second focus group corroborated these barriers and emphasised institutional cultures that subtly reinforce masculine norms of leadership. For example, one of them explained:

*Leadership is still defined in masculine terms—assertiveness, emotional detachment, and dominance. If you lead differently, you're seen as ineffective.*

Several participants mentioned institutional gaslighting, a term used to describe how concerns raised by women are trivialized or reinterpreted. As noted by a participant:

*When you raise gender equity concerns, you're told you're being 'too sensitive' or 'playing the woman card'. It's a dismissal of lived reality.*

Another also highlighted how visibility can be both a platform and a burden:

*Once you become a female leader, you're hyper-visible. Every misstep is magnified. You're not just representing yourself—you're representing all women.*

This visibility, compounded by societal roles, leads to emotional exhaustion. As one of them explained:

*There's constant pressure to prove yourself, to outperform, to justify your seat at the table. It's exhausting.*

Participants also lamented the lack of institutional recourse for gender-based challenges.

For example, one participant remarked:

*There's no grievance system that's gender-sensitive. You just have to tolerate it or risk being seen as disruptive.*

Another also added:

*Many of us avoid confrontation because we know the institution won't protect us. Silence becomes a survival tool.*

These narratives reveal that leadership for women in technical universities is not solely a position but a site of contestation. Leadership roles are inhabited within a terrain marked by persistent gender asymmetries and institutional opacity. The women's accounts show that entry into leadership is not the end of struggle but the beginning of new negotiations, often invisible to those outside these roles.

A key existential tension emerges between having authority and being authorized. Women may hold formal titles but are often denied the full spectrum of influence, respect, and trust that those titles imply. In both focus groups, it became evident that while women have arrived at leadership, the journey continues through persistent struggle against entrenched gendered expectations, institutional rigidity, and cultural narratives that problematize female authority.

#### **5.2.6. Theme 6: Institutional Strategies for Addressing Barriers Faced by Women Aspiring to Leadership in Technical Universities**

This final theme examines how Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana are instituting (or neglecting) formal and informal strategies to address the gendered constraints encountered by women leaders. Consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology, the analysis interprets these strategies as not merely procedural mechanisms but lived interventions that either affirm or deny women's existential aspirations within institutional life. Participants in FG1 offered a nuanced view of institutional responses, with many suggesting that while gender equity discourse has gained visibility, concrete institutional commitments remain fragile and uneven.

For example, one of the participants in the first focus group said:

*There are gender policies now, yes, but they are often dormant—crafted for accreditation purposes rather than lived implementation.*

Several participants shared that while gender desks or committees exist, their operational capacities are limited due to underfunding and low prioritization.

Another explained:

*Our gender unit doesn't even have a dedicated office or staff. It's just a checkbox to satisfy stakeholders.*

Training and capacity-building initiatives were also seen as inconsistent. For example, a participant noted:

*There was a gender sensitivity workshop two years ago. That was it. It didn't cascade into any long-term leadership pipeline.*

However, a few participants acknowledged incremental gains in leadership training initiatives targeting junior female staff. A participant shared:

*We've started mentoring programmes, mostly informal. I've mentored two junior staff members and encouraged them to apply for coordinator roles.*

Nonetheless, others emphasized that mentoring alone cannot dismantle institutional cultures. For example, a participant stated:

*Mentoring without systemic change is like patching a leaking roof—you need to rebuild the structure, not just mop the floor.*

Another concern raised was the lack of monitoring and evaluation systems for gender-related interventions. A participant in the first focus group remarked:

*We implement policies without tracking their effectiveness. There's no data, no follow-up, no accountability.*

Participants in FG2 offered more optimistic assessments, citing a few institutional reforms that appear more strategic and results-oriented. One member of the group shared:

*My university has instituted a female leadership development scheme—an annual programme that selects and trains women for middle and senior management roles.*

This initiative, however, remains an exception rather than the rule. Other participants reiterated the lack of enforcement mechanisms to ensure gender equity in appointments and promotions. A group member explained:

*Policies exist, but there's no equity audit. Appointments still favour 'old boys' networks, especially in technical departments.*

Another emphasized that most interventions are reactive rather than proactive:

*Gender issues come up only when there's a crisis or scandal. We need proactive gender mainstreaming across all units.*

Participants highlighted that involving male allies in gender strategies could improve

the success of these strategies. For example, one commented:

*Until men become part of the solution, these strategies won't gain traction. Leadership must model inclusive behaviour, not just delegate it to gender desks.*

Another member from the second group also underscored the role of leadership culture:

*If your VC doesn't champion gender equity, all your policies are just paper. Cultural change starts at the top.*

A particularly compelling insight was the role of cross-institutional learning. For

example, A group member shared:

*We recently partnered with another technical university that has made significant progress. Sharing best practices really helped us rethink our approach.*

Across both focus groups, it becomes clear that institutional strategies, when present, tend to exist more as aspirational documents than lived commitments. Participants' lived experiences reflect a dissonance between policy architecture and practical infrastructure. The analysis reveals that while mentoring, training, and the establishment of gender desks are important first steps, they are insufficient without structural recalibration. Participants called for integrated gender mainstreaming, embedding equity into hiring, evaluation, budgeting, research funding, and leadership development pathways. Moreover, the absence of accountability systems erodes institutional credibility and signals performative commitment rather than authentic transformation. Yet, the data also indicate that meaningful change is possible when top leadership models gender-responsive behaviours, when strategies include both women and men, and when there is room for inter-institutional collaboration. These

cases of progressive reform were shared with cautious optimism, symbols of what is possible, not yet what is typical.

## **6.1. Analysis of Results**

This section of the study discusses the key results on;

1. career progression of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.
2. factors that contribute to career progression of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.
3. challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities
4. opportunities available to women aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.
5. barriers women who have attained leadership positions in Technical Universities report that hinders them in their leadership roles in the Southern part of Ghana.
6. strategies initiated by Technical Universities in dealing with challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions.

### **6.1.1. Career progression of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana**

The research objective focused on uncovering the career progression trends of women in leadership within Technical Universities in Southern Ghana. The results reveal several critical insights about this progression. Firstly, despite the significant strides women have made, the number of women in key strategic leadership roles remains relatively low. This indicates that while progress is being made, there is still a substantial gender gap in leadership positions within these institutions. The low

number of women in these positions suggests that systemic barriers and gender biases continue to impede women career advancement in technical universities. This underrepresentation can perpetuate a cycle of inequality, where the lack of female role models and mentors in leadership positions further discourages young women from pursuing similar paths. Consequently, the potential talent pool for leadership roles remains limited, hindering the overall progress toward gender equality in these institutions.

Another major implication is the potential stagnation in institutional culture and innovation. With few women in leadership roles, the diverse perspectives and leadership styles they bring such as collaboration, empathy, and inclusivity are less likely to be fully integrated into the Organisational framework in technical universities. This lack of diversity in leadership can result in a homogenous decision-making process, which may not effectively address the varied needs and challenges within the university environment. Moreover, without substantial representation of women, efforts to promote continuous career development and break down traditional barriers might not receive the necessary institutional support, slowing down the overall progress in achieving a more equitable and dynamic leadership landscape in technical universities.

Nevertheless, the results further demonstrate that despite the underrepresentation of women in key leadership roles, the few who do occupy strategic positions are making notable strides in their leadership roles. In other words, while the underrepresentation of women in key leadership roles within Technical Universities in Southern Ghana remains a challenge, the notable strides made by those who do occupy these positions reveal a promising trend. This achievement demonstrates that once women break

through the initial barriers to entry into leadership, they can excel and significantly impact their institutions. These women are not only taking on leadership roles but are also bringing about positive changes within their universities. Their success serves as a testament to their capabilities and the potential benefits of having more women in leadership positions.

One positive implication of this finding is the demonstration of women's ability to thrive in leadership roles once given the opportunity. The notable strides made by these women in strategic positions reveal that they bring unique perspectives and approaches to leadership that can enhance the functioning and culture of their institutions. Their achievements highlight the importance of breaking down barriers that prevent women from rising to leadership roles. When institutions actively promote gender diversity in leadership, they benefit from a broader range of skills, experiences, and ideas, which can lead to more innovative solutions and improved decision-making processes.

Another worth noting implication is the role modeling effect these women leaders provide. The visibility of successful women in strategic positions within technical universities serves as an inspiration for other women aspiring to leadership roles. This representation is crucial in challenging and changing the prevailing gender stereotypes that often discourage women from pursuing leadership positions. When female students and junior staff in technical universities see women excelling in high-level roles, it can boost their confidence and aspirations to follow similar career paths. This can create a virtuous cycle where increasing numbers of women are motivated to seek and achieve leadership roles, further promoting gender equality within these institutions.

The results further highlight the evolving leadership styles among women leaders in technical universities in Southern Ghana. Unlike traditional male-dominated leadership approaches, which often emphasize authority and top-down management, women in these roles are adopting more diverse and evolving leadership styles. These styles include a greater emphasis on collaboration, empathy, and inclusivity. Such leadership approaches can lead to more effective team dynamics and a more positive Organisational culture, which are essential for the growth and development of technical universities. This shift in leadership style reflects broader trends in modern Organisational management, where soft skills and emotional intelligence are increasingly valued. One positive implication of this trend for technical universities in the southern zone of Ghana is the enhancement of institutional culture and performance.

Women leaders who prioritize collaboration, empathy, and inclusivity can foster a more supportive and cohesive work environment within the Universities they operate. This can improve communication and teamwork among staff and students, leading to higher morale and productivity. When diverse perspectives are valued and respected, innovation and problem-solving capabilities are also enhanced. These inclusive leadership styles can help technical universities stay at the forefront of educational excellence and technological advancements by creating an environment where all members feel valued and motivated to contribute their best efforts.

Moreover, the evolving leadership styles employed by women leaders in technical universities have practical advantages for the institutions they lead. Collaborative and inclusive leadership approaches are particularly well-suited to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the modern workplace. In an era characterized by

rapid change, complexity, and uncertainty, leaders who value teamwork and open communication can better navigate these dynamics. Such leadership can foster a culture of continuous learning and resilience, which is crucial for technical universities aiming to adapt to new technological trends and maintain educational excellence. By embracing these evolving leadership styles, women leaders can drive positive change and innovation within their institutions.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that women in leadership roles in these technical universities are making conscious efforts toward continuous career development. This commitment to ongoing learning and professional growth is crucial for maintaining their effectiveness as leaders in a rapidly changing field. Continuous career development allows these women to stay updated with the latest technological advancements, educational methodologies, and leadership strategies. For women themselves, the commitment to continuous career development has profound personal and professional benefits. It allows them to build and refine their leadership skills, making them more effective and influential in their roles. This ongoing development helps them overcome traditional barriers and biases, enabling them to break through the glass ceiling that has historically limited women's advancement in technical fields. By staying current with emerging trends and technologies, these women ensure they remain relevant and competitive in their careers, which can lead to further career advancement opportunities. The active pursuit of continuous professional development by women leaders ensures that they bring the latest knowledge and best practices into their institutions. This not only improves the quality of education and administration but also positions these universities at the forefront of technological and educational advancements. As a result, the universities can attract more students

and faculty, foster a more dynamic learning environment, and achieve higher academic standards and reputations.

The findings align with a recent empirical study by Shoaib et al. (2025) who revealed similar trends in the underrepresentation of women in technical and leadership roles, despite their significant contributions and capabilities. Like the women in Ghana, Pakistani women who manage to attain leadership positions are often highly effective and bring diverse perspectives that enhance Organisational performance. Similarly, a study in Zambia by Chibale and Mwansa (2022) found that women in leadership roles within banking sector faced systemic barriers, but those who succeeded demonstrated exceptional leadership styles characterized by empathy and inclusivity. These leadership styles positively impacted institutional culture and performance, echoing the findings from Ghana, from the perspectives of female leaders in technical Universities. In Kenya, research by Mulrean (2020) and Muthambi et al. (2025) highlighted the impact of continuous professional development on women's career progression in technical fields. Kenyan women leaders in universities, much like their Ghanaian counterparts, are making conscious efforts toward continuous learning and career development. This commitment not only enhances their individual competencies but also contributes significantly to the overall innovation and effectiveness of their institutions. By staying updated with the latest advancements and best practices, these women leaders ensure that their institutions remain competitive and forward-thinking, further demonstrating the broader applicability of the study's findings in different contexts.

The findings of the study align closely with Acker's (2012) gender role theory. According to Acker's gender role theory, societal expectations and norms shape the division of labour and opportunities between men and women, leading to the

perpetuation of gender inequalities in various domains, including leadership positions. The results of the study corroborate this theory by highlighting the persistent underrepresentation of women in key strategic leadership roles within Technical Universities in Southern Ghana. Despite the significant strides made by women, systemic barriers and gender biases continue to impede their career advancement in technical education, thus perpetuating a cycle of inequality. This finding underscores the ongoing influence of societal expectations and norms on women's access to leadership opportunities, consistent with Acker's gender role theory.

Similarly, the findings are cognisance with Eagly and Karau's role congruity theory that posits that individuals are more likely to be perceived as effective leaders when their leadership behaviours align with societal expectations of their gender roles. The study findings support this theory by demonstrating that women leaders in technical universities in Southern Ghana are adopting more collaborative, empathetic, and inclusive leadership styles. These evolving leadership styles deviate from traditional male-dominated approaches and reflect broader trends in modern Organisational management, emphasizing soft skills and emotional intelligence. The positive implications of these leadership styles, such as enhanced institutional culture and performance, align with Eagly and Karau's theory, as they suggest that women leaders who prioritize collaboration and inclusivity can foster a more supportive and cohesive work environment, thus improving Organisational outcomes.

Overall, the findings above provided fresh evidence regarding the utilization of the qualitative research paradigm in unraveling the career progression trends of women in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana, a subject conspicuously missing in existing literature from the Ghanaian perspective. By delving into the experiences

and insights of women leaders within Technical Universities in Southern Ghana, the study sheds light on critical aspects of women's career advancement that have been overlooked or understudied in previous research. Through qualitative inquiry, the findings captured the nuanced exploration of the career journeys and experiences of female leaders in technical education, their motivation for pursuing leadership positions in technical universities, their evolving leadership style and approach, defining moments and key decisions that influenced women career progression as well as their career aspirations. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of their career progression trends and institutional dynamics that shape women's experiences in technical education leadership, providing valuable insights for future research and policy interventions aimed at promoting gender equity and diversity in higher education leadership. Thus, the study contributes to filling a notable gap in the literature and underscores the importance of qualitative research in addressing complex issues related to women's career progression in technical universities.

### **6.1.2. Factors contributing to women career progression in leadership in Technical Universities in Ghana**

The second research question sought to explore the factors that contribute to career progression trends of women in Technical Universities in Ghana. The findings shed light on various factors that contribute to enhancing women's career progression trends in technical universities in the Southern zone of Ghana. First, teamwork and positive work attitudes emerged as crucial factors in promoting women's career advancements in technical universities in southern Ghana. These elements foster a collaborative environment where colleagues support one another, creating a positive and encouraging workplace. The results implies that, teamwork and positive work attitudes are vital for promoting women's career advancements in technical

universities in southern Ghana, as they create a collaborative and supportive environment. This means that, when colleagues work together harmoniously and maintain encouraging attitudes, women are more likely to receive the support and mentorship they need to navigate career challenges. This environment fosters mutual respect and collective problem-solving, allowing women to leverage the strengths and insights of their peers. Such a culture not only enhances individual career trajectories but also builds a network of support that is crucial for sustained career growth, especially in fields traditionally dominated by men. More so, the emphasis on teamwork and positive work attitudes could also impact the overall performance of technical universities. A supportive and collaborative work environment boosts morale and productivity among all staff members, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and efficiency. For technical universities, this could translate into improved employee wellbeing, better student outcomes and enhanced institutional reputation. Thus, when women are empowered to advance in their careers through such a conducive work culture, their increased participation and leadership could further drive innovation and academic excellence. Fostering teamwork and positivity not only benefits individual career advancements but also significantly enhances the overall performance and success of technical universities.

Mentorship and networking significantly contributed to women's career advancement in technical universities in southern Ghana by offering essential guidance, support, and opportunities. This implies that, mentorship initiatives provide women with role models who have navigated similar challenges, offering personalized advice and strategies for success. Also, the results further imply that, providing women with networking opportunities allows them to build connections that can lead to new opportunities, collaborations, and access to resources that might otherwise be

unavailable. These relationships can help mitigate the effects of gender bias and discrimination by creating a supportive community that champions women's professional development. As a result, women are better equipped to advance into leadership roles and achieve their career goals within technical universities. Another implication is that, when women are supported through effective mentorship and robust networking opportunities, they are more likely to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their institutions. This enhanced productivity comes from the diverse perspectives and innovative ideas that women bring to the table, which can drive research, improve teaching methodologies, and foster an inclusive academic environment. Additionally, a university that actively supports women's career advancement can attract a broader talent pool, including both students and faculty, thereby enhancing the institution's reputation and competitiveness.

Organisational factors, such as supportive structures and policies like staff development committees and educational sponsorships, have played a crucial role in facilitating the career advancement of women in technical universities in southern Ghana. These mechanisms provide the necessary support and opportunities for professional growth, enabling women to overcome potential barriers and progress in their careers within the academic and technical fields. Also, organisational support mechanisms in place could help to level the playing field by providing women with the resources and opportunities needed to build their skills, gain further qualifications, and assume leadership roles. As a result, women are more likely to experience upward mobility within their institutions, breaking through the traditional barriers that have historically limited their career progression. This not only empowers individual women but also sets a precedent for future generations, fostering a more inclusive and diverse academic environment. Also, organisational support mechanisms are

necessary recipe for improving overall productivity of technical. Educational sponsorship and professional development opportunities ensure that all staff members, regardless of gender, have the chance to refine their expertise and contribute more effectively to their roles. This inclusive approach leads to higher job satisfaction, reduced turnover rates, and a more dynamic and collaborative work environment. Ultimately, the cumulative effect of these supportive policies is a significant boost in the productivity and competitiveness of technical universities, positioning them as leaders in education and research within the Southern zone of Ghana and beyond.

The findings further demonstrate that personal factors, such as individual values, philosophies, and a commitment to continuous learning and development, have a profound impact on the career progression of women in technical universities in southern Ghana. One implication of these findings is that women who prioritize their personal growth and embrace lifelong learning are more likely to advance in their careers. This focus on self-improvement can help women acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles, making them more competitive for promotions and leadership positions. Furthermore, their personal commitment to development can inspire a sense of resilience and determination, enabling them to overcome institutional and societal barriers that may otherwise impede their career progression. Additionally, these findings have positive implications for other women aspiring to leadership positions in technical universities. The emphasis on personal factors highlights the importance of fostering a mindset oriented towards growth and development. Aspiring female leaders can draw inspiration from the success of those who have advanced by actively engaging in continuous learning and aligning their career paths with their values and philosophies. This perspective encourages a proactive approach to career development, where women are empowered to seek out

opportunities for professional growth, mentorship, and networking. By cultivating a community of driven and self-motivated individuals, the overall environment within technical universities can become more conducive to supporting women's leadership ambitions, ultimately leading to greater gender diversity in higher-level positions.

Religious beliefs and cultural factors play a crucial role in supporting and shaping the career advancement of women in technical universities in southern Ghana. These influences provide a moral framework that encourages and sustains women's efforts to progress in their careers. One significant implication of the finding that religious beliefs and cultural factors support women's career progression in technical universities in southern Ghana is that it highlights the importance of a strong moral foundation in career development. In other words, women's trust and faith in God, coupled with culturally ingrained values such as perseverance, dedication, and communal support, contribute to their resilience and determination to overcome professional barriers. This moral support system helps women navigate the challenges associated with pursuing advanced roles in technical fields, which have traditionally been male-dominated. The implication is that institutional policies and programmes aiming to enhance women's career advancement should incorporate and respect these religious and cultural dimensions, creating an environment that aligns with and reinforces these supportive values. Furthermore, the positive impact of religious and cultural support on women currently in technical universities serves as an inspirational model for other women aspiring to leadership positions in these institutions. Seeing peers and mentors who attribute their success to a combination of professional efforts and strong moral and cultural backing can motivate aspiring leaders to follow similar paths. This cultural reinforcement encourages women to aspire to and achieve leadership roles, knowing they have a supportive community

and moral framework to rely on. Consequently, fostering an environment that values and integrates these religious and cultural supports can lead to a broader increase in female representation in leadership within technical universities, promoting gender equality and diversity in higher education leadership in southern Ghana.

The study's findings resonate with several empirical studies conducted in other jurisdictions shedding light on similar trends and factors influencing women's career progression in technical education. Buse et al. (2013) and Petean & Rincon (2024) conducted a study on women's leadership in STEM fields in Germany, which highlighted the importance of mentorship, networking, and Organisational support in promoting women's career advancement. Similarly, the study's emphasis on mentorship, networking, and Organisational factors aligns with the findings of Petean and Rincon, affirming the significance of these factors across different contexts. Similarly, Mwalyagile (2020) explored factors influencing women's career progression in technical fields in Tanzania, emphasizing the role of personal factors, mentorship, and cultural attitudes in shaping women's experiences and opportunities. The study's focus on personal factors, mentorship, and cultural factors resonates with the findings of Mwalyagile (2020), suggesting common challenges and opportunities faced by women in technical education across different regions. More so, Okoro (2025) investigated women's leadership in engineering education in Nigeria, highlighting the importance of continuous learning, Organisational support, and cultural factors in women's career advancement. The study's emphasis on continuous learning, Organisational factors, and cultural factors aligns with the findings of Okoro, indicating similar patterns and challenges in women's career progression in technical fields.

The findings resonate strongly with Eagly and Karau's (2002) Role Congruity Theory, which posits that individuals are often evaluated based on the alignment between the characteristics associated with their gender and the requirements of their roles. In the context of women's career progression in technical universities in Southern Ghana, factors such as teamwork, positive work attitudes, mentorship, networking, and Organisational support mechanisms contribute to creating a conducive environment that aligns with the expectations of leadership roles. The emphasis on teamwork and positive work attitudes fosters a collaborative atmosphere where women are perceived as fitting into leadership positions, as they demonstrate qualities like cooperation and supportiveness traditionally associated with feminine stereotypes.

Similarly, mentorship and networking initiatives provide women with essential guidance and opportunities, aligning with societal expectations for women to seek guidance and build relationships. These supportive mechanisms help mitigate gender biases and stereotypes by providing women with the necessary tools and support to excel in leadership roles, thus reinforcing the congruity between their gender and their leadership positions. Moreover, the emphasis on personal factors underscores the importance of individual values and commitment to continuous learning, which aligns with the notion that women who actively engage in self-improvement and career development are perceived as fitting into leadership roles, as they demonstrate ambition and drive congruent with leadership expectations. Therefore, the findings offer empirical support for the Role Congruity Theory by illustrating how various factors contribute to enhancing women's career progression in technical universities in Southern Ghana by aligning with societal expectations and stereotypes associated with women in leadership roles.

The study provides fresh evidence on the factors influencing women's career progression in technical universities in southern Ghana, highlighting the critical roles of teamwork, positive work attitudes, mentorship, networking, and Organisational support mechanisms. These findings emphasize the importance of a collaborative and supportive work environment in facilitating women's career advancements, where mutual respect and collective problem-solving help women navigate challenges and leverage peer strengths. Mentorship and networking further demonstrate that personal relationships and guidance significantly aid in advancing into leadership roles. Additionally, the study shows that religious beliefs and cultural factors provide a moral framework supporting women's career progression, offering a model for other aspiring female leaders. This cultural reinforcement encourages women to pursue leadership roles confidently, knowing they have a supportive community and moral backing. Integrating these supports can enhance female representation in leadership, promoting gender equality and diversity in higher education leadership in southern Ghana.

### **6.1.3 Challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in Ghana**

The third research objective sought to find out the challenges women face when aspiring leadership positions in Technical Universities in southern zone of Ghana. The results demonstrate that, women aspiring for leadership positions in technical universities in the southern part of Ghana face significant Organisational challenges, including being bypassed in communication, needing to adopt assertive behaviours, and navigating resistance and Organisational politics influenced by gender biases. Being bypassed in communication can severely limit women's access to critical information and decision-making processes. This exclusion can lead to missed

opportunities for career advancement and diminished visibility within the Organisation, resulting in slower career progression.

For prospective women leaders, the anticipation of being sidelined in crucial conversations can be highly discouraging, making them less inclined to strive for leadership roles where they fear their contributions might be undervalued or ignored. The necessity for women to adopt assertive behaviours in a professional environment can be a double-edged sword. While assertiveness is often seen as a positive trait, women who exhibit such behaviours may be unfairly labeled as aggressive or uncooperative due to pervasive gender stereotypes. This can lead to workplace conflict and decreased support from colleagues and superiors, further hindering career advancement.

Additionally, the pressure to constantly navigate and manage perceptions can lead to burnout and reduced job satisfaction. For women considering leadership positions, the fear of negative backlash from being assertive can deter them from fully embracing and pursuing their leadership potential, thereby reinforcing the status quo of male-dominated leadership. Navigating resistance and Organisational politics influenced by gender biases presents another formidable challenge. Women often have to contend with implicit and explicit biases that question their capabilities and suitability for leadership roles. This resistance can manifest in various ways, including being excluded from influential networks and decision-making circles, or facing disproportionate scrutiny and criticism. Such an environment can create significant psychological stress and impede professional growth.

The negative implications for career progression include a perpetuated cycle of underrepresentation in leadership and diminished opportunities for mentorship and

sponsorship. For prospective women leaders, the prospect of facing entrenched gender biases and Organisational resistance can be profoundly discouraging, potentially leading them to abandon their leadership aspirations altogether. Indeed, these Organisational challenges collectively create a hostile environment that not only hinders the career progression of current women leaders but also serves as a significant deterrent to future generations of women aspiring to leadership roles.

The findings further revealed that, women aspiring for leadership positions in technical universities in the southern part of Ghana faced cultural and societal norms that undermined their contributions, making it difficult for them to balance professional and family duties. This implies that, while pursuing leadership roles in technical universities in Ghana, women's ideas and initiatives were frequently disregarded or undervalued in professional settings, leading to frustration and diminished motivation. This lack of recognition not only stifled innovation but also hindered their ability to build a professional reputation, ultimately slowing their career advancement.

Another implication was the persistent gender biases that created an unwelcoming work environment. This implies women were often left with no other option than to work twice as hard to prove their competence, leading to increased stress and burnout. This added pressure not only affected their job performance but also their overall well-being, making long-term career progression increasingly difficult in technical universities. For prospective women who intended to pursue leadership positions, these cultural and societal norms posed a daunting barrier. The constant struggle for acknowledgment and the need to continually prove oneself could deter talented women from aspiring to leadership roles in the first place. The perception that their

contributions would be consistently undervalued could lead to a lack of ambition and confidence, reducing the pool of potential female leaders in technical universities. Furthermore, balancing professional and family duties presented another set of challenges, with severe implications for women's career progression.

One negative implication was the constant juggling act between work responsibilities and family obligations, which often led to compromises in one area or the other. Women found themselves unable to fully commit to either domain, leading to a perception of inadequacy in both. This dual pressure hampered their ability to focus on career growth, often resulting in missed opportunities for advancement. Additionally, the lack of support systems, such as flexible work hours and childcare facilities, further exacerbated the situation. Without adequate support, women were more likely to experience career stagnation, as they had to prioritize family needs over professional development. Societal expectations that limited career advancement had their own set of detrimental implications. One was the stereotype that leadership roles were better suited for men, which led to fewer opportunities for women. This bias resulted in women being overlooked for promotions and key projects, creating a glass ceiling that was difficult to break. Another implication was the internalization of these societal expectations by women themselves, which could lead to a lack of self-confidence and ambition. Women might hesitate to seek out leadership roles, believing that they were not suitable or capable, thus self-limiting their career potential.

Women aspiring for leadership positions in technical universities in the southern part of Ghana face gender discrimination that manifests in several detrimental ways: being sidelined, having their qualifications questioned, and facing lower expectations based

on gender. The results imply that, when women are sidelined, they are often excluded from important meetings, decision-making processes, and networking opportunities. This exclusion limits their visibility and access to critical information, which stunts their career growth and denies them opportunities to showcase their capabilities. As a result, women may experience slower career advancement compared to their male counterparts, and their potential contributions to leadership and institutional development remain untapped. The questioning of women's qualifications is another pervasive form of gender discrimination.

Despite having the same or higher credentials and experience as their male colleagues, women used for the study often find their expertise doubted and their achievements undervalued. This continual scrutiny can erode their confidence and sense of professional worth, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy where they may hesitate to take on challenging projects or leadership roles. The negative implications include reduced opportunities for professional development and a demoralizing work environment that hampers ambition and growth. This can also demotivate prospective women leaders in that, the fear that their qualifications will be perpetually questioned can deter them from seeking advanced roles, as they anticipate constant validation struggles that their male peers do not face. Facing lower expectations based on gender further compounds the challenges women encountered while pursuing leadership roles in technical universities. When institutional biases set lower expectations for women, it affects their performance appraisals, promotion prospects, and the type of responsibilities they are assigned. This bias creates a glass ceiling effect, where women are not provided the same opportunities to prove themselves in leadership capacities, leading to fewer women in high-ranking positions.

The negative implications for career progression are profound, as women are systematically denied the chance to advance and contribute at higher levels. If this issue is not addressed, it could adversely affect prospective women leaders, as the knowledge that they will face lower expectations and biased evaluations can significantly deter them from aspiring to leadership roles. Indeed, these manifestations of gender discrimination collectively create a hostile and unequal environment that severely hampers women's career progression and dissuades potential leaders from pursuing advanced roles.

The findings revealed that women aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana faced significant pushbacks from their colleagues, characterized by skepticism, resistance, intimidation, and envy. The skepticism faced by women often manifested as doubt about their capabilities and qualifications, leads to major negative implications for their career progression. One implication was the persistent questioning of their competence, which undermined their confidence and credibility. This environment of doubt made it difficult for women to assert their authority and gain the respect needed to effectively lead their teams. Another implication was the additional burden of having to constantly prove themselves, diverting their focus and energy from strategic leadership activities to defending their competence. Resistance from colleagues posed another significant challenge, with severe implications for women's career progression. This resistance poses significant challenges hindering women ability to drive positive change and showcase their leadership capabilities.

Additionally, these resistances often translate into a lack of collaboration and support from peers, isolating women leaders and making it difficult for them to build strong professional networks. This isolation stunted women career growth and limited their

opportunities for advancement in technical universities. Intimidation was another organisational formidable challenge that adversely affected women career growth in technical universities. One serious implication is the creation of a threatening and unwelcoming work environment, which could lead to high levels of stress and anxiety. This toxic atmosphere could negatively impact their mental health and overall job satisfaction, making it difficult to maintain the drive and focus needed for career advancement. This issue extends beyond the individual level and have the tendency of even affecting other prospective women's career growth.

For prospective women leaders, the knowledge that they might face bullying and harassment could discourage them from pursuing leadership positions altogether. This reluctance to step into leadership roles could perpetuate the gender imbalance in technical university leadership, limiting the diversity of perspectives and experiences at the top. Envy from colleagues also posed substantial challenges to women leaders while pursuing leadership positions in technical universities. One implication was the spread of rumors and falsehoods designed to discredit women leaders. This character assassination not only tarnished their reputation but also eroded trust and support from other colleagues. Another implication was the active efforts to block their career advancement through manipulation and political maneuvering. This sabotage reduces their chances of securing promotions and key roles, effectively stalling their career growth.

The findings agree a research by McKinsey et al. (2020) across sectors in the US highlighted similar Organisational challenges for women. They discovered that women were often ignored concerning certain business decisions and faced resistance due to gender biases. The study found that these Organisational barriers significantly

impeded women's career progression, echoing the struggles faced by women in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. More so, in Tanzania, Kapinga & Suero-Montero (2017) investigated women leaders in the food processing industry and found that they faced substantial gender discrimination. Their study found that, cultural and societal norms complicate women professional lives, making it difficult to balance work and family duties, ultimately leading to burnout and reduced job satisfaction. In Zimbabwe, research by Chisango and Nyoni (2020) on women in public universities revealed parallel challenges. Women aspiring for leadership positions encountered skepticism, bullying, and intimidation from their own colleagues. The study highlighted how these issues undermined the confidence and professional credibility of women, similar to the experiences of women in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.

The findings on the challenges faced by women aspiring for leadership positions in technical universities in southern Ghana are highly consistent with Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory. This theory posits that prejudice toward female leaders arises from a perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles. In the current study, women face significant Organisational challenges, such as being bypassed in communication and needing to adopt assertive behaviours, which are seen as incongruent with traditional female roles. This leads to a double bind where assertive women are labeled as aggressive, thereby encountering resistance and Organisational politics influenced by gender biases. The anticipation of being sidelined in crucial conversations discourages women from pursuing leadership roles, aligning with role congruity theory's assertion that the mismatch between societal expectations for women and leadership roles creates significant barriers.

The findings presented above further affirms gender role theory which further elucidates the societal and cultural norms that undermine women's contributions in professional settings. In the context of the study, women aspiring to leadership roles in technical universities face cultural and societal expectations that make it difficult to balance professional and family duties. This results in increased stress and burnout, as women are often forced to work twice as hard to prove their competence. The constant need to prove oneself, coupled with the lack of recognition, stifles innovation and hinders career advancement. Gender role theory explains these dynamics by highlighting how societal expectations shape the professional experiences and challenges of women.

Also, the findings further affirm the glass ceiling theory is particularly relevant in understanding the structural barriers that limit women's career progression. This theory describes an invisible barrier that prevents women from rising to top leadership positions despite having the necessary qualifications and experience. In technical universities in southern zone of Ghana, women face gender discrimination that manifests in being sidelined, having their qualifications questioned, and facing lower expectations based on gender. These barriers create a glass ceiling effect, where women are systematically denied opportunities for advancement and are excluded from influential networks and decision-making processes. The persistent questioning of women's competence and the lower expectations set by institutional biases further compound these challenges, reinforcing the glass ceiling and perpetuating the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles.

#### **6.1.4. Opportunities available for women aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana**

The fourth research objective sought to find out the opportunities available for women in aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. The study illuminated several key opportunities that women aspiring to leadership roles leveraged to propel their career progression. Among these, the policy of study leave with pay emerged as a significant facilitator, empowering women to augment their academic qualifications and ready themselves for leadership responsibilities. By offering this support, institutions not only acknowledge the value of continued education but also enable women to bridge potential skill gaps, thereby enhancing their competence and competitiveness in leadership positions. The policy of study leave with pay presents a profound implication for women aspiring to leadership roles in technical universities in Ghana. It signifies a tangible commitment from institutions towards gender equality and professional development. The results imply that, for women navigating the challenging terrain of academia and aspiring for leadership positions, this opportunity serves as a beacon of hope and empowerment.

The results further demonstrate that, in accessing study leave with pay, women are not only afforded the financial means to pursue higher education but also the time and support to concentrate on academic endeavors without sacrificing their livelihoods. This opportunity sends a powerful message to aspiring female leaders, affirming that their ambitions are not only valid but actively supported by the institution. It breaks down barriers that often hinder women's advancement, such as financial constraints or the need to juggle multiple responsibilities. Moreover, the availability of study leave with pay signals a shift towards a more inclusive and progressive Organisational culture within technical universities. It sets a precedent for future generations of

female scholars and leaders, demonstrating that institutional support for women's advancement is not merely rhetoric but actionable policies. Ultimately, this opportunity instills confidence and motivation in young women, paving the way for a new generation of empowered and capable leaders in Ghana's technical universities.

External partnerships played a pivotal role in expanding women's horizons, providing invaluable networking avenues and exposure to international experiences. Such collaborations not only broaden perspectives but also cultivate crucial connections that can foster career growth. The significance of external partnerships in expanding women's horizons within technical universities in Ghana extends far beyond individual career growth. These partnerships not only provide invaluable networking avenues and exposure to international experiences but also pave the way for broader systemic change. While many of these collaborations may not be specifically tailored for women's career progression, their existence creates opportunities for women to proactively engage and leverage these networks to propel their own career growth. Moreover, the embrace of technology as a catalyst for career advancement underscores the need to address infrastructural barriers such as internet connectivity. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, institutions can ensure equitable access to technological opportunities, leveling the playing field for women aspiring to leadership roles.

For other women seeking leadership positions within technical universities in Ghana, the implication of these opportunities is profound. By actively engaging in external partnerships and embracing technology, women can not only advance their own careers but also contribute to reshaping institutional cultures and practices to be more inclusive and supportive of women's leadership development. Through collective efforts to leverage external networks and address infrastructural barriers, women can

pave the way for a more equitable and dynamic landscape where all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to thrive and lead.

Furthermore, within the institutions, concerted efforts towards diversity and inclusion fostered a supportive ecosystem for women's leadership development. By nurturing an environment that values and celebrates diversity, Organisations cultivate a culture where women can thrive, develop their leadership acumen, and pursue higher roles with confidence. The emphasis on diversity and inclusion within institutions sets a precedent for systemic change, signaling to other women aspiring to leadership roles that their contributions are not only valued but actively encouraged. This creates a ripple effect, inspiring more women to pursue leadership positions with the knowledge that they are entering an environment where their perspectives will be respected and their talents nurtured.

Also, the existence of targeted career development programmes and advocacy initiatives signifies a commitment to addressing the unique challenges that women may face in their career progression. By tailoring support and resources specifically for women, institutions send a clear message that they are invested in overcoming barriers to gender parity in leadership roles. This not only empowers individual women but also sends a broader message to the academic community that gender equity is a priority. The results imply, as more women see tangible pathways to leadership roles and experience the support of their institutions, the landscape becomes increasingly conducive for women to pursue and excel in leadership positions.

The study also revealed that the advent of interdisciplinary programmes and evolving fields within technical universities in Ghana has created fertile ground for women to

forge leadership pathways. These emerging domains, which often span multiple areas of expertise and innovation, allow women to utilize their diverse skill sets and perspectives effectively. By engaging in interdisciplinary studies, women can integrate knowledge from different fields, fostering creativity and driving innovative solutions to complex problems. The results also mean that, for women aspiring to leadership roles, these opportunities signify a broader platform to showcase their talents and capabilities beyond traditional boundaries. As they lead transformative initiatives within these new fields, they not only advance their careers but also pave the way for a more inclusive academic environment.

This inclusive atmosphere, in turn, encourages more women to pursue and succeed in leadership positions, challenging existing gender norms and promoting gender equity. The success of women in these roles exemplifies the impact of diverse leadership on institutional progress and innovation, thus fostering a dynamic academic landscape where talent and leadership are recognized regardless of gender. This paradigm shift has far-reaching implications, inspiring other women to aspire to and attain leadership roles, ultimately enriching the leadership fabric of Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.

The findings presented above concurred with an empirical study conducted by Ananias et al. (2023) in Namibia which revealed that external partnership efforts significantly enhance career growth for women in the brewery industry. Their study stressed that, external partnerships provide women with essential networking opportunities and exposure to international markets, allowing them to gain valuable insights and experiences that can be leveraged for career advancement. This aligns with findings from the study in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana,

where external partnerships also play a crucial role in expanding women's career opportunities through networking and exposure to international experiences.

The findings presented above are consistent with evidence from the wider Southern African built environment sector, where women in construction and related professions report that inclusive organisational cultures, targeted gender equity initiatives and mentoring structures are critical for their career advancement in male dominated settings (Ozumba and Ozumba, 2012; Haupt and Madikizela, 2009; Martin and Barnard, 2013).

The study found that inclusive Organisational cultures that actively promote diversity enable women to develop leadership skills and advance in their careers. These efforts create supportive environments where women can thrive, similar to the findings from the current study, which emphasized the importance of diversity and inclusion in fostering women's leadership development in technical universities. Both studies underscore the critical role of inclusive practices and external partnerships in advancing women's careers across different sectors.

#### **6.1.5. Barriers Women Encounter after Attaining Leadership Positions in Technical Universities**

The fifth research objective sought to analyse barriers women who have attained leadership positions in technical universities report that hinders them in their leadership roles in the Southern part of Ghana. The results demonstrated, female leaders in technical universities in Southern Ghana continue to confront substantial barriers that hinder their effectiveness and growth in leadership roles. These barriers include gender-related biases, Organisational obstacles, work-life balance challenges, and entrenched cultural expectations. The study found that gender-related biases in

technical universities are insidious and pervasive which significantly undermine authority and competence of female leaders. These biases often manifest in three primary forms: stereotypes, derogatory remarks, and doubts about qualifications. The results demonstrated that, stereotypical beliefs about gender roles are deeply ingrained in many cultures, leading to the assumption that leadership is inherently a male domain.

The results imply that, women leaders are often perceived as less assertive, less competent in decision-making, and more emotional, which are seen as negative traits in leadership. These stereotypes create an environment where these female leaders have to constantly prove their competence beyond what is expected of their male counterparts. When such biases are not addressed, they perpetuate a cycle of undervaluing women's contributions and discouraging them from pursuing leadership roles in technical universities. This not only limits the individual growth of female leaders but also deprives technical universities the diverse perspectives and innovative approaches that women can bring to leadership.

Gender related biases also manifest in derogatory remarks, severely undermine a female leader's confidence and authority. In fact, comments that belittle women's achievements or focus on their physical appearance rather than their professional capabilities are common. These remarks create a hostile work environment that can be demoralizing and alienating. The consequences of unchecked derogatory remarks could lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased stress, and a higher likelihood of female leaders leaving their positions. Furthermore, such a toxic environment discourages other women from aspiring to leadership roles, perpetuating a cycle of gender inequality. The results further showed that, women who have attained

leadership roles continue to face persistent doubts about their qualifications and their legitimacy in leadership. Women often face excessive scrutiny over their credentials and experience, far more than their male counterparts. This skepticism can result in female leaders being passed over for promotions, receiving less support from colleagues, and having their decisions questioned more frequently. The implications of this bias are dire: it not only hinders the career advancement of individual women but also signals to the broader community that women are less capable leaders. This undermines efforts towards gender equality and diminishes the overall talent pool available for leadership positions.

#### **6.1.6. Organisational Barriers add Another Layer of Difficulty for Female**

##### **Leaders**

Issues such as backbiting, envy from colleagues, and invisible obstacles create a hostile work environment. In fact, backbiting and envy among colleagues create an insidious workplace environment that particularly disadvantages female leaders. These actions foster distrust and conflict, diverting attention from collaborative goals and eroding morale. Female leaders targeted by backbiting, envy and unwarranted criticisms are likely to have diminished confidence and effectiveness. The psychological toll may further escalate into heightened stress levels, anxiety, and depression, which could adversely impact their decision-making and leadership capabilities.

Furthermore, when female leaders are continually undermined by their peers, it not only discourages them but also sends a disheartening message to other women aspiring to leadership roles. Also, invisible obstacles, such as implicit biases and structural inequities, present significant challenges to female leaders in technical education in the Southern Zone of Ghana. The results demonstrate that, when these

implicit organisational biases and subtleties accumulate, it could lead to a significant disadvantage for female leaders compared to their male counterparts. The results further demonstrate that, when female leaders are not supported or are actively undermined, it creates factions and silos within the institution. This lack of unity can lead to miscommunication, inefficiencies, and a breakdown in teamwork, which are detrimental to achieving common goals. The absence of a collaborative culture stifles innovation, as diverse ideas are not shared or valued.

The results further demonstrated that, balancing professional responsibilities with family duties still remains a significant challenge for female leaders in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. The intense pressure to maintain work-life balance can significantly diminish the capacity of female leaders to perform their duties optimally. This could escalate into burnout which can lead to frequent absences, decreased motivation, and lower overall performance, undermining the progress and innovation they are capable of driving within their institutions. This not only hampers the personal and professional growth of these leaders but also impacts the broader educational environment, stalling potential advancements in technical education. Additionally, the stress of balancing these responsibilities can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, further diminishing the leaders' effectiveness and overall well-being. More so, the visible struggles of current female leaders in managing work-life balance can deter other women from aspiring to leadership roles. When potential female leaders observe the personal and professional toll that these roles can take, they may feel discouraged from pursuing such paths, fearing similar outcomes for themselves. This perpetuates the gender gap in leadership within technical education, as fewer women step forward to take on these roles.

The reluctance of women to aspire to leadership positions due to perceived or real challenges in balancing work and family life means that the pool of talented and capable leaders is significantly reduced. The results demonstrate that, technical universities have not done much in supporting female leaders in managing work-life balance challenges. In fact, without adequate support systems, such as flexible working hours, parental leave policies, and on-site childcare facilities, institutions are likely to see a decline in the retention of female leaders. This not only affects the institution's immediate performance but also its long-term ability to foster an inclusive and progressive educational environment.

In many communities, leadership roles are traditionally viewed as male-dominated, creating significant hurdles for women even after they have attained initial leadership positions. These cultural barriers perpetuate the belief that women are less capable leaders, often leading to their marginalization within higher echelons of leadership. This societal mindset can demoralize female leaders, impact their confidence and motivation, and subsequently limit their career progression. In technical universities, this cultural bias means that leadership remains predominantly male. Such a gender imbalance in leadership can stifle diversity of thought, as male leaders may not fully appreciate or address the unique challenges and perspectives that female colleagues bring. Consequently, this lack of diverse leadership can hinder the development and implementation of more inclusive policies and practices, which are essential for fostering a supportive and progressive educational environment. The persistence of these cultural barriers thus impedes the career progression of women, undermining the potential for a more equitable and innovative technical education sector.

The study agrees with Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory which is built on the assumption that prejudice against female leaders arises because leadership roles are often seen as incongruent with traditional female roles. The findings from the study align with this theory, demonstrating that gender-related biases in technical universities undermine the authority and competence of female leaders. The stereotypes, derogatory remarks, and doubts about qualifications reflect the incongruity between the societal expectations of women and the traits traditionally associated with leadership. The findings further validate Gender Role Theory which also suggests that societal expectations and norms dictate specific behaviours and roles for men and women, often placing women at a disadvantage in leadership positions. The study's findings support this theory, highlighting how entrenched cultural expectations and stereotypes reinforce the notion that leadership is inherently a male domain. Female leaders in technical universities face persistent doubts about their qualifications and are subjected to derogatory remarks that belittle their professional achievements.

These cultural barriers are deeply ingrained, leading to the assumption that women are less competent in leadership roles. The findings also affirm Glass Ceiling Theory which also describes the invisible barriers that prevent women from ascending to top leadership positions despite their qualifications and achievements. The study's findings align with this theory, revealing how Organisational barriers and implicit biases create a hostile work environment for female leaders in technical universities. Women face backbiting, envy, and unwarranted criticisms, which erode their confidence and effectiveness. Moreover, the lack of support in managing work-life balance further exacerbates these challenges, leading to burnout and decreased job satisfaction. These barriers not only limit the individual growth of female leaders but

also deter other women from pursuing leadership roles, perpetuating gender inequality. The study demonstrates that without adequate institutional support and a collaborative culture, technical universities risk losing talented female leaders, thereby diminishing the overall talent pool and hindering the institution's ability to foster an inclusive and innovative educational environment.

The barriers faced by female leaders in technical universities in Southern Ghana align with findings from similar studies conducted in other jurisdictions. For instance, Noreen and Khalid (2012) highlighted that female leaders in Pakistani universities often confront pervasive gender biases that undermine their authority and capabilities. Similar to the Ghanaian context, these biases manifest as stereotypes and derogatory remarks, creating a hostile work environment that erodes women's confidence and effectiveness as far as leading in technical universities are concerned. This concurrence underscores the universal nature of gender-related obstacles in academic leadership, suggesting that cultural and Organisational biases against women in leadership positions are widespread and not confined to a single geographic region. In South Africa, Booyesen & Nkomo (2010) found that female leaders in higher education institutions face significant Organisational barriers, including sabotaging, envy, and organisational politics. These issues foster a divisive environment that hinders collaboration and innovation. The findings from the current study from the perspectives of female leaders in technical universities in the southern part of Ghana, reflect these challenges. These parallels suggest that Organisational culture in technical universities globally often fails to support female leaders adequately, thereby limiting their potential and contributions to the institution's success.

Studies in Kenya, such as those by Hockett (2021) also revealed that balancing professional and family responsibilities remains a significant challenge for female

leaders. The intense pressure to maintain work-life balance was found to cause burnout and decrease motivation, similar to the findings in the current study. The similarities across these diverse contexts highlight a critical need for institutions to implement supportive policies, such as flexible working hours and childcare facilities, to help female leaders manage work-life balance effectively and enhance their overall well-being.

#### **6.1.7. Strategies set up by Technical Universities in dealing with challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions**

The last research objective sought to explore strategies set up by Technical Universities in dealing with challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions. The results that emerged were that Technical Universities have implemented few strategies to address the challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions. One significant strategy is the establishment of gender advocacy centers and the development of comprehensive policies aimed at combating gender disparities. These centers and policies are designed to create an equitable environment by addressing issues such as discrimination, harassment, and biases that women encounter in their professional journey. For women aspiring to leadership positions in technical universities, these centers and policies signal a commitment to creating a fair and supportive environment, potentially reducing the systemic barriers they might face. This can encourage more women to pursue leadership roles, knowing there are institutional measures in place to support their progression.

For women already in leadership positions, these initiatives can provide a safer and more equitable work environment, allowing them to perform their roles more effectively without the added burden of combating discrimination and harassment. By

institutionalizing these measures, universities aim to foster a culture of inclusivity and support for women aspiring to leadership positions.

Mentorship and sponsorship programmes have also been introduced, although their effectiveness varies across institutions. These programmes pair aspiring female leaders with experienced mentors who provide guidance, support, and career development advice. While some programmes have successfully fostered leadership skills and provided networking opportunities, others are still in the process of optimizing their impact. For aspiring female leaders, these programmes offer critical guidance and support, helping them navigate their career paths and overcome obstacles through the advice and advocacy of experienced mentors. This can significantly boost their confidence and career prospects. For women who have already attained leadership positions, mentorship programmes provide opportunities to further develop their leadership skills and expand their professional networks. Sponsorship programmes, in particular, ensure that senior leaders advocate for their continued career advancement, which can help them secure higher positions and more significant influence within the institution.

Specialized training and skill development initiatives represent another critical strategy. Although these initiatives are often not specifically tailored to women, they provide valuable opportunities for all staff members to enhance their skills and competencies. These training programmes cover various aspects of leadership, management, and technical expertise, equipping women with the necessary tools to excel in leadership roles. This initiative could offer profound implications to women who are aspiring for leadership roles and those who are already in leadership positions in technical institutions. For women aspiring to leadership roles, these training

programmes can help build the necessary knowledge and expertise required for such positions, making them more competitive candidates. For current women leaders, these initiatives provide ongoing professional development, ensuring they remain at the forefront of their fields and continue to grow their leadership capabilities. This continuous learning is essential for maintaining their effectiveness and advancing to even higher levels of leadership.

Collaborative efforts with industries and the formation of support networks such as Women in Technical Education and Development (WITTED) also play a pivotal role. These networks provide a platform for women to connect, share experiences, and support each other's professional growth. Industry collaborations offer practical exposure, internships, and job placements, thereby bridging the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application. For women aspiring to leadership positions, these networks and industry collaborations offer mentorship, practical exposure, internships, and job placements, which are invaluable for gaining the experience and connections needed for leadership roles. These initiatives help bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application, making women more prepared and competitive for leadership positions. For women already in leadership roles, these networks provide ongoing support and opportunities for professional growth. They offer a community of peers who understand their challenges and can offer advice, support, and advocacy, which is crucial for their sustained success and advancement in technical universities.

The findings from studies conducted in other countries resonate with the results of the current study regarding strategies implemented by technical universities to address challenges faced by women aspiring for leadership positions. In Finland, as

emphasized by authors such as Lehtonen and Järvinen (2019), initiatives like gender advocacy units have been pivotal in combating gender biases and discrimination. Similarly, mentorship and sponsorship programmes, highlighted by researchers like Kalumba et al. (2023) in Zambia, have been instrumental in addressing gender disparities within public universities. These programmes offer guidance and support to aspiring female leaders, aiding in their career development and confidence-building. Moreover, the Ugandan study, exemplified by works such as Chioda et al. (2023) underscores skill development initiatives and collaborative efforts aimed at empowering women in higher education institutions, aligning with the broader goal of creating a conducive environment for female leadership.

## **6.2. Discussion**

The persistent underrepresentation of women in strategic leadership roles continues to highlight the deep-rooted influence of systemic and cultural barriers commonly described as the glass ceiling. Despite improvements in access to education and professional opportunities, many women still encounter invisible institutional and societal structures that limit their upward mobility into decision-making positions. These barriers often manifest in biased promotional practices, limited access to influential networks, and gendered expectations of leadership behaviour. As a result, women remain disproportionately absent from senior academic and administrative positions, reinforcing gender disparities within institutions. This reality underscores the need for deliberate institutional reforms that prioritize equitable promotion pathways, transparent recruitment processes, and proactive leadership development opportunities for women (Alice, Eagly, & Linda, 2007).

A range of supportive mechanisms has been identified as essential in advancing women's participation in leadership. Mentorship and professional networking opportunities play a critical role in equipping women with the guidance, confidence, and social capital required to navigate complex Organisational structures. Similarly, supportive institutional policies such as leadership development programs, inclusive professional development initiatives, and flexible work arrangements—create environments where women can thrive professionally. These elements align closely with theories of social and Organisational support, which emphasize that individuals' professional growth is strongly influenced by the systems and relationships surrounding them. In practice, institutions that intentionally cultivate mentorship structures, encourage collaborative professional communities, and foster a learning-oriented culture are better positioned to support women's leadership development and long-term retention (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010).

Despite these supportive mechanisms, women pursuing leadership roles continue to face significant challenges shaped by entrenched gender norms and structural inequalities. Societal expectations often frame leadership as a traditionally masculine domain, which can result in implicit bias, discrimination, and scepticism toward women in positions of authority. Additionally, many women must navigate the competing demands of professional advancement and family responsibilities, leading to persistent work–life conflicts. These realities illustrate the relevance of role congruity and gender role theories, which explain how societal perceptions about gender-appropriate behaviour influence evaluations of leadership competence. Consequently, women may be judged more critically or discouraged from aspiring to leadership positions. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive anti-bias strategies, inclusive workplace cultures, and family-friendly policies that enable

women to pursue leadership without facing disproportionate personal or professional sacrifices (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

While challenges remain, several institutional initiatives present meaningful opportunities to advance women's leadership representation. Programs such as paid study leave, academic partnerships, research fellowships, and institutional inclusion policies can significantly enhance women's access to leadership pathways. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends largely on equitable implementation and consistent monitoring to ensure that opportunities reach those who need them most (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Even when women attain leadership positions, they may still encounter subtle biases, heightened scrutiny, and cultural pressures that limit their ability to lead effectively. This reality confirms that appointment alone does not guarantee genuine inclusion; sustained Organisational commitment and culture change are essential (Williams & Dempsey, 2014). Consequently, institutions must strengthen existing gender advocacy and mentorship programs through rigorous implementation, continuous evaluation, and context-sensitive adaptation. Such strategic and sustained efforts are critical for transforming Organisational cultures and achieving long-term gender equity in leadership (Dobbin, & Kalev, 2016).

### **6.3. Chapter Summary**

This section of the study presented and discussed the results on barriers to women career progression trends in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. The findings revealed that only a few women hold key strategic leadership roles in technical universities in the southern part of Ghana, but those who do have made significant strides, developed diverse leadership styles, and consciously pursued continuous career development, breaking traditional barriers and inspiring future female leaders. Also, the key factors contributing to women career progression trend

in technical universities in the southern part of Ghana included teamwork, positive work attitudes, mentorship, networking, Organisational support, continuous learning, personal and religious factors, and cultural considerations. Again, challenges women aspiring leadership roles in technical universities encounter included Organisational, cultural, societal, gender discrimination, family and caregiving challenges, and pushback from colleagues. Also, opportunities for aspiring women leaders encompassed study leave with pay, external partnerships, advancements in technology, diversity and inclusion efforts, and interdisciplinary programmes. However, even after attaining leadership positions, women continued to face gender biases, Organisational obstacles, work-life balance issues, and cultural expectations. In response, Technical Universities have implemented strategies such as gender advocacy centers, policies to combat gender disparities, mentorship and sponsorship programmes, specialized training, and collaborative efforts with industries and support networks like Women in Technical Education and Development (WITTED).

The next chapter of the study encompassed several critical components aimed at providing a comprehensive conclusion to the research. It began with a summary of the findings, encapsulating the key points and insights derived from the investigation into the women career progression, challenges, and opportunities for women in leadership positions within Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana. Following the summary, the chapter presented the conclusions drawn from the research. These conclusions synthesized the findings, offering a clear interpretation of what the data suggested about the state of women's leadership in technical universities. It discussed the broader significance of the results, considering how they reflected on gender dynamics within higher education leadership and the effectiveness of strategies employed by Technical Universities. The recommendations section provided

actionable advice based on the study's findings. These recommendations were directed at various stakeholders, including university administrators, policymakers, and advocacy groups, outlining practical steps that could be taken to enhance the career progression of women aspiring to and holding leadership positions in Technical Universities. Finally, the chapter offered suggestions for further studies. Recognizing the limitations and scope of the current research, the section proposed areas for future investigation that could build on the findings of this study.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1. Introduction

The study aimed to explore the barriers to career progression of women in leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana, with a particular focus on institutions located in the southern part of the country. The study specifically sought to:

1. explore the career progression of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.
2. find out the factors that contribute to the career progression of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.
3. explore the challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.
4. find out the opportunities available to women aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana.
5. find out the barriers women who have attained leadership positions in Technical Universities face in their leadership roles.
6. find out strategies initiated by Technical Universities in dealing with challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions.

Aligned with these objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What are the career progressions of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana?
2. What factors contribute to career progression of women in leadership in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana?

3. What challenges do women in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana face when aspiring for leadership positions?
4. What are the opportunities available for women in aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in the Southern part of Ghana?
5. What barriers do women who have attained leadership positions in Technical Universities report that hinder them in their leadership roles in Ghana?
6. What are the strategies set up by Technical Universities in dealing with challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions?

The study was underpinned by three theoretical frameworks Glass Ceiling Theory, Role Congruity Theory, and Gender Role Theory which provided a multidimensional understanding of the systemic, societal, and institutional barriers encountered by women in leadership roles. A qualitative research approach was adopted, rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, to allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences. The design followed a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, capturing personal stories and subjective meanings attached to career progression and leadership experiences. The researcher held a prior "hunch" that sociocultural expectations, institutional biases, and gender-based norms play significant roles in limiting women's advancement in leadership within Technical Universities. The sample comprised 12 women in leadership positions key officers, management members, and deans from selected Technical Universities in southern Ghana. These participants were purposefully selected using a maximum variation technique to ensure a broad representation of leadership experiences. Data collection was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide and focus group that facilitated consistency while allowing participants to freely express their perspectives. The

collected data were analysed thematically to identify recurrent patterns, insights, and divergent views across the narratives.

## 5.2. Key Findings

The key results that emerged are as follows;

1. The study found that, only a few women hold key strategic leadership roles in technical universities in the southern part of Ghana, but those who do have made significant strides, developed diverse leadership styles, and consciously pursued continuous career development, breaking traditional barriers and inspiring future female leaders.
2. Also, the key factors contributing to women career progression trend in technical universities in the southern part of Ghana included teamwork, positive work attitudes, mentorship, networking, Organisational support, continuous learning, personal and religious factors, and cultural considerations.
3. Again, challenges women aspiring leadership roles in technical universities encounter included Organisational, cultural, societal, gender discrimination, family and caregiving challenges, and pushback from colleagues.
4. Also, opportunities for aspiring women leaders encompassed study leave with pay, external partnerships, advancements in technology, diversity and inclusion efforts, and interdisciplinary programmes.
5. The study also found that, even after attaining leadership positions in Technical Universities, women continued to face gender biases, Organisational obstacles, work-life balance issues, and cultural expectations.
6. Technical Universities have implemented strategies such as gender advocacy centers, policies to combat gender disparities, mentorship and sponsorship

programmes, specialized training, and collaborative efforts with industries and support networks like Women in Technical Education and Development (WITTED).

### **5.3 Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn from the study. The findings from this study confirm that women in leadership within technical universities in the southern part of Ghana continue to be underrepresented in strategic positions, yet those who have advanced into such roles demonstrate exceptional resilience, adaptability, and a strong sense of purpose. Their presence, albeit limited, symbolizes a transformative shift in the traditionally male-dominated academic landscape. These women not only serve as pioneers but also embody the evolving image of leadership that blends professional excellence with context-sensitive emotional intelligence and ethical engagement, thus providing a model for aspiring female leaders.

The study further concludes that women's upward mobility in leadership is not incidental but the result of an intricate interplay of individual agency, relational support systems, and enabling Organisational cultures. The convergence of mentorship, institutional backing, networking, and socio-cultural reinforcement underscores the need for a holistic approach to leadership development. Thus, fostering women's leadership in technical universities requires the deliberate integration of interpersonal, institutional, and ideological resources tailored to the lived experiences of women in higher education.

Despite the growing recognition of women's contributions to leadership, significant barriers persist, indicating that access to leadership remains structurally constrained.

Organisational hierarchies, gendered norms, societal expectations, and work-family dynamics jointly impede the smooth transition of women into and through leadership roles. The persistence of these challenges suggests that systemic transformation is essential one that addresses both policy and practice, and recognizes leadership as a gendered and contextual process.

The availability of enabling opportunities points to a shifting institutional climate that is slowly becoming more inclusive. However, access to such opportunities remains uneven. The conclusion drawn is that while structural provisions such as study leave, external partnerships, and diversity initiatives are commendable, their impact depends on equitable implementation and culturally responsive designs. Opportunities must therefore be both accessible and contextually meaningful to sustain inclusive leadership development.

The persistence of gender bias and institutional resistance even after leadership attainment affirms that positional advancement does not equate to full integration or influence. Women in leadership often face symbolic inclusion without substantive empowerment. Thus, the conclusion here is that leadership equity must go beyond appointment and include support mechanisms that challenge deep-seated biases, redistribute authority, and institutionalize gender-sensitive leadership practices.

Finally, the strategic responses adopted by technical universities indicate growing institutional awareness of gender disparities. While policies, mentorship schemes, and advocacy centers represent positive steps, the conclusion is that sustainable change depends on institutional accountability, stakeholder ownership, and a continuous review of gender equity frameworks. Technical universities must cultivate inclusive

leadership ecosystems that not only support women's entry into leadership but also foster their sustained influence, well-being, and transformative impact.

#### **5.4. Contribution to Knowledge**

This thesis contributes to knowledge by providing a context-specific understanding of the career progression of women in leadership within Technical Universities in Ghana, a subject that has received limited empirical attention in existing literature. While prior studies on women's leadership have largely focused on corporate Organisations or traditional universities, this study expands the discourse by examining the unique institutional and socio-cultural dynamics shaping women's leadership trajectories within Technical Universities. Through an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of female leaders, the study identifies key factors that facilitate women's advancement, the barriers they encounter before and after attaining leadership positions, and the institutional opportunities that influence their career development. By generating empirical evidence from Ghana's Technical University context, the study fills an important gap in the literature and provides insights into how gendered institutional cultures, mentorship structures, and Organisational practices influence leadership progression in technical higher education institutions. Furthermore, the study contributes theoretically and practically to the broader scholarship on gender and leadership in higher education. By applying and critically engaging with existing theoretical perspectives such as the glass ceiling, role congruity, and gender role theories within a Ghanaian academic context, the study extends the applicability of these frameworks to non-Western institutional environments. The findings also provide evidence-based insights that can inform institutional policies and leadership development initiatives aimed at improving gender equity within Technical Universities. In doing so, the study offers practical

guidance for policymakers, university administrators, and gender advocacy institutions seeking to strengthen women's representation in leadership positions, thereby supporting the broader goal of inclusive governance and sustainable development in Ghana's higher education sector.

### **5.5. Policy Implications**

The findings of this study have important implications for policy development within Ghana's tertiary education sector, particularly in relation to ongoing reforms aimed at strengthening the effectiveness and inclusiveness of higher education institutions. Ghana's tertiary education reforms have increasingly emphasized the transformation of Technical Universities into centres of innovation, industrial collaboration, and applied research. However, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within these institutions suggests that gender equity must become a central component of these reforms. Policymakers, including the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), should therefore integrate gender-responsive strategies into higher education governance frameworks. This could include setting institutional targets for women's participation in leadership roles, incorporating gender equality indicators into university performance evaluations, and ensuring that leadership development initiatives actively support the advancement of women within Technical Universities.

The study also underscores the importance of strengthening gender mainstreaming efforts across Ghana's tertiary education institutions. Gender mainstreaming requires the systematic integration of gender perspectives into policies, programmes, and institutional practices to ensure that both men and women benefit equitably from development initiatives. Universities should therefore institutionalize gender-sensitive policies that address structural and cultural barriers affecting women's career

progression. Establishing well-resourced gender advocacy centres, strengthening mentorship programmes for female academics, and promoting inclusive leadership training initiatives can help create supportive institutional environments for women aspiring to leadership positions. In addition, gender mainstreaming should extend to curriculum development, research priorities, and institutional governance structures in order to foster a more inclusive academic culture.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for reforms in human resource (HR) policies and practices within Technical Universities. Recruitment, promotion, and leadership selection processes should be reviewed to ensure transparency, fairness, and gender neutrality. HR departments should adopt gender-responsive promotion criteria that recognize diverse leadership competencies and address potential biases in evaluation processes. Flexible work arrangements, family-friendly workplace policies, and structured mentorship programmes can also help mitigate the work–life balance challenges often faced by women in academia. By strengthening HR practices and aligning them with gender equality objectives, Technical Universities can create more equitable career progression pathways for women and contribute to the broader national agenda of inclusive development and sustainable institutional governance.

## **5.6. Implications for Future Research**

The findings of this study highlight several areas that warrant further scholarly investigation. Future research could expand the scope of inquiry beyond Technical Universities in the southern part of Ghana to include institutions in other regions of the country, as well as other categories of higher education institutions, such as traditional universities, colleges of education, and private universities. Comparative studies across different institutional contexts would provide a broader understanding of the structural and cultural factors influencing women’s leadership progression in

Ghana's tertiary education sector. Additionally, future studies could adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs to examine how women's leadership trajectories evolve over time and how institutional reforms influence gender equity in leadership positions. Further research could also explore the perspectives of male leaders, policymakers, and human resource managers to better understand institutional decision-making processes that shape leadership opportunities for women.

### **5.7. Implications for Theory**

The findings of this study also have important theoretical implications for the understanding of gender and leadership within higher education. By examining women's leadership experiences in Ghana's Technical Universities, the study provides empirical insights that extend the applicability of existing theoretical frameworks such as the glass ceiling theory, role congruity theory, and gender role theory. The findings suggest that these theories, which have largely been developed and applied in Western contexts, must be interpreted within the socio-cultural and institutional realities of African higher education systems. The study demonstrates how cultural expectations, Organisational practices, and institutional norms interact to shape women's leadership trajectories, thereby highlighting the need for theoretical models that integrate both structural and cultural dimensions of gender inequality in leadership. Consequently, the study contributes to the ongoing refinement of gender and leadership theories by providing context-specific insights from the Ghanaian tertiary education environment.

### **5.8. Implications for Practice**

The study also offers practical implications for institutional leaders, policymakers, and human resource practitioners within Ghana's Technical Universities. The findings

underscore the importance of creating supportive institutional environments that facilitate women's leadership development and career progression. University management should strengthen mentorship programmes, leadership training initiatives, and networking opportunities that support aspiring women leaders. Additionally, institutional policies and human resource practices should be reviewed to address structural barriers that limit women's advancement into senior leadership positions. By implementing inclusive leadership development strategies and promoting gender-sensitive Organisational cultures, Technical Universities can enhance women's participation in decision-making roles. Such efforts not only contribute to gender equity within higher education but also strengthen institutional governance and innovation by drawing on the diverse perspectives and leadership capacities of both women and men.

### **5.9. Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed for policy consideration.

1. Technical universities should establish transparent and gender-inclusive succession planning frameworks to deliberately prepare and appoint more qualified women into strategic leadership roles. These frameworks should include targeted talent identification, leadership pipelines, and structured mentorship programmes to support women's upward mobility and address existing gender gaps in top-tier academic leadership.
2. Technical Universities should institutionalize leadership development programmes that are multidimensional, combining formal training with mentorship, networking opportunities, and psychosocial support. These programmes must reflect the lived realities of female academics and integrate

context-specific cultural and religious values that shape women's career trajectories, thus ensuring both cultural relevance and sustainable impact.

3. It is imperative that university management actively dismantle systemic barriers, such as rigid hierarchies, gender stereotypes, and caregiving penalties, through gender audits, policy reforms, and capacity-building for leadership inclusivity. Strategic engagement with both male and female stakeholders will be necessary to shift institutional mindsets and foster a culture of shared responsibility for gender equity.
4. Technical universities should adopt mechanisms that guarantee equitable access to leadership-enhancing opportunities such as scholarships, study leave, international partnerships, and interdisciplinary collaborations. These mechanisms should be continuously evaluated to ensure they do not unintentionally exclude women due to institutional politics, family responsibilities, or other structural constraints.
5. To mitigate the continued gender biases and Organisational resistance faced by women post-appointment, it is recommended that technical universities implement post-leadership induction programmes. These should focus on leadership resilience, conflict navigation, and collaborative decision-making, while offering peer support networks to reinforce belonging, influence, and mental well-being among female leaders.
6. Finally, technical universities must enhance the effectiveness of existing gender strategies, such as gender advocacy units and partnerships with networks like WITTED, by embedding monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Periodic reviews, impact assessments, and inclusive feedback loops should be institutionalized to ensure that these initiatives remain

relevant, impactful, and aligned with evolving gender equity goals in higher education leadership.

### **5.5. Suggestions for future Research Studies**

1. Future studies should employ a quantitative research paradigm to enhance the generalizability of findings and provide a broader statistical foundation for understanding the career progression and challenges faced by female leaders in technical universities. Including more female leaders, especially from across the country, in the sample will provide a more comprehensive representation of the population, ensuring that the results are applicable to a wider range of contexts. This approach will allow more precise measurement of variables and facilitate comparison of findings across studies.
2. Additionally, the current study focused on female leaders in technical universities located in the southern zone of Ghana. Future research should explore other zones to provide comparative insights and to understand regional differences in the experiences of female leaders. Such comparative studies can highlight unique challenges and opportunities specific to different zones, contributing to a deeper understanding of female leadership in technical universities nationwide.
3. Moreover, it is essential for future studies to explore in detail the effectiveness of the strategies currently in place to address female leadership subjugation in technical universities. Evaluating these strategies can provide valuable feedback for improving existing programmes and developing new initiatives to support female leaders. Understanding the impact of these strategies on career progression and leadership effectiveness will help institutions tailor their approaches to better meet the needs of female leaders.

4. Lastly, future research should consider employing a longitudinal approach to capture the dynamics of career progression and leadership challenges over time. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into how the experiences and barriers faced by female leaders evolve, offering a more comprehensive view of their career trajectories. This approach will also allow researchers to track the long-term impact of interventions and policies aimed at supporting female leadership in technical universities.



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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND  
MANAGEMENT  
PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORM**

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Mary Benson, a PhD. Student from Department of Educational Management and Administration. The purpose of this study is to explore the Career progression of women in the Technical Universities in the southern part of Ghana. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your current or future relationship with the university or any other institution. You will be asked to respond to questions during one-on-one interview schedule to air your views on career progression trends, barriers to women career progression, factors that contributes to women career progression, as well as the opportunities that enhance women career progression in Technical Universities in Ghana. The interview session will last for approximately 30 minutes to complete. Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Also, your responses will be anonymized and will not be linked to your personal identity. Only aggregated data will be used in the study's findings. By signing this form, you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above, and you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your valuable contribution to this research study.

**APPENDIX B**

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND**

**ADMINISTRATION**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS**

Dear Madam:

This Interview Guide has been designed to seek your views on ‘Career Progression of Women focusing on barriers women who have attained leadership positions in Technical Universities report that hinders them in their leadership roles’. You have been purposely selected to participate in this interview because your enviable leadership track record fits into the purpose of the study. All information gathered will be treated with utmost confidentiality and be used for academic purposes only.

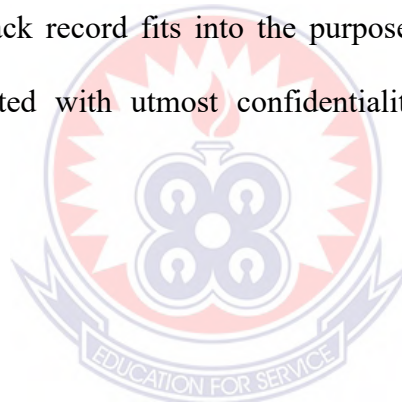
Thank you.

Mary Benson

0248200620

Time of Interview: .....

Date: .....



### **Section A- Demography of Participants**

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. What is your educational background?
3. How long have you been in the field of education?

### **Section B- Career Progression of Women in Leadership in Technical Universities in Ghana**

1. Could you share your personal journey and experiences in advancing through leadership roles within Technical Universities in Ghana, highlighting key milestones and transitions?
2. What motivated you to pursue leadership positions in the technical universities, and how have your aspirations evolved over the course of your career?
3. How has your leadership style and approach evolved as you moved into higher leadership positions within the university, and what lessons have you learned along the way?
4. What were some of the defining moments or decisions that significantly influenced your career progression as a woman leader within Technical Universities in Ghana?
5. In what ways have you leveraged your expertise and experiences to mentor and support other women aspiring to leadership roles within the technical education sector?
6. Looking ahead, what are your aspirations and goals for your continued career progression as a woman leader in Technical Universities in Ghana?

### **Section C: Factors contributing to women career progression in leadership in Technical Universities in Ghana**

1. Could you identify the key factors or attributes that you believe have played a crucial role in your successful career progression as a woman leader within Technical Universities in Ghana?
2. How important have mentorship and networking been in shaping your leadership journey, and can you share specific instances where these factors have positively impacted your career?

3. Can you discuss any institutional initiatives, policies, or programmes that have provided support and opportunities for your career advancement within the university?
4. How has your commitment to continuous learning and professional development contributed to your ability to navigate leadership challenges and advance in your career?
5. In what ways have your personal values, beliefs, and leadership philosophy influenced your career trajectory within the technical education sector?
6. Reflecting on your experiences, what advice or insights would you offer to other women aspiring to leadership positions within Technical Universities in Ghana?

**Sections D: Challenges women faces when aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in Ghana**

1. Can you describe some of the specific challenges and obstacles you encountered while pursuing leadership positions within Technical Universities in Ghana?
2. How did societal or cultural norms influence your journey, and what strategies did you employ to overcome gender-related barriers in your pursuit of leadership roles?
3. Were there any instances where you felt your qualifications or competencies were questioned or overlooked based on your gender, and how did you respond to such situations?
4. Could you share examples of instances where you had to balance work and family responsibilities while aspiring for leadership roles within the university?
5. Were there any moments when you encountered resistance or pushback from colleagues, peers, or superiors, and how did you navigate these challenges to continue your career progression?

### **Section E: Opportunities available for women aspiring for leadership positions in Technical Universities in Ghana**

1. Can you share examples of opportunities or initiatives within Technical Universities that you leveraged to enhance your skills, visibility, and potential for leadership roles?
2. How did you identify and capitalize on external partnerships or collaborations that opened doors for you to advance in your leadership career within the technical education sector?
3. In what ways have you seen the evolving landscape of technology and education create new avenues for women to excel and assume leadership roles within Technical Universities?
4. Can you discuss any instances where diversity and inclusion efforts within the university contributed to creating more opportunities for women to pursue leadership positions?
5. Have you encountered mentors or advocates who actively championed your advancement, and how did their support contribute to your career progression within the university?
6. How do you envision the role of emerging fields and interdisciplinary programmes in expanding opportunities for women to assume leadership roles within Technical Universities in Ghana?

### **Section F: Barriers Women encounter after attaining leadership positions in Technical Universities**

1. Can you describe specific barriers you have faced in your leadership role within Technical Universities in Ghana after attaining your position?
2. How do gender-related biases or stereotypes manifest in your interactions with colleagues, staff, and stakeholders, and how have you navigated these challenges?
3. Can you share examples of how work-life balance challenges or caregiving responsibilities have impacted your effectiveness and opportunities in your leadership role?
4. How have you managed to maintain your professional resilience and overcome any instances of resistance or negativity that you encountered in your leadership position?

5. Looking forward, how do you envision overcoming or mitigating these barriers to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women leaders in Technical Universities?

**Section G: Strategies set up by Technical Universities in dealing with challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions**

1. Can you provide insights into the strategies or initiatives that Technical Universities in Ghana have established to address the challenges women face when aspiring for leadership positions?
2. How do these universities actively promote mentorship and sponsorship programmes that support the career growth and leadership aspirations of women within the technical education sector?
3. Can you discuss any policies or Organisational changes that have been implemented to mitigate gender-based biases and create a more inclusive environment for women?
4. In what ways do Technical Universities offer specialized training, skill development, or leadership programmes tailored to the unique needs of aspiring women leaders?
5. Can you share examples of collaborative efforts between universities and industry partners to create pathways for women to assume leadership roles and contribute to the sector's growth?
6. How do Technical Universities facilitate peer support networks or forums where women aspiring to leadership positions can share experiences and insights to overcome challenges?

Thank You