THE GLASS CEILING SYNDROME AND SELF-INFLICTED LIMITATIONS AND SLOW CAREER PROGRESSION OF WOMEN IN ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

BENIN CITY

NOVEMBER 2025

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BEING A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY NIGERIA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE [B.SC.] (HONS) DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK.

NOVEMBER 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this original research work was carried out by **Isoken El-Phrida Amenaghawon** with matriculation number SSC2106007 under strict supervision and has been approved as adequate in scope and content in partial fulfillment for the award of Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) Degree in Social Work, University of Benin.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Almighty God.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank the Almighty God for His grace, wisdom, and strength that guided me throughout the course of this research work and my academic journey at the University of Benin. Without His divine help, this achievement would not have been possible.

My profound gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Ernest Osas Ugiagbe for his patience, guidance, and invaluable advice throughout the process of this study. Your encouragement helped shape this work into its final form. Also to the head of department Dr. (Mrs.) H.E Eweka and my course advisor Mrs. P Adebayo, Dr. Kingsley Ehigie, Dr. Ukponahiusi. Owie and to all staffs of the department of Social Work for the learning opportunity provided, I sincerely grateful

My profound gratitude goes to my beloved mother Mrs. Vivian I. Eguasa thank you for your endless love, prayers, encouragement, moral and financial support and your belief in me kept me going even when things became challenging. Thanks goes to my father Mr. Matthew Edobor for his support. My special thanks goes my big Daddy Rev. Fr. Joachim Osigwe, OSA for his love, care, encouragement and financial support thank you for your concern and care. Thanks to my aunties for their care and love show towards me Fidelia, Christiana, Patience, Elizabeth and Mercy, and my uncle Christopher.

Thanks to my friends for being there for me Osemudiamen, Damilola, Gift, Alexandra, Precious, Pamela and Victory thank you for your motivation, laughter,

and understanding throughout this journey. And to rest I didn't mention I love you all.

Above all honour, adoration, glory and majesty be unto thee Lord God who is the author and finisher of my faith.

ISOKEN EL-PHRIDA AMENAGHAWON
University of Benin
November 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between institutional barriers, psychological factors, and career progression among female academic staff at the University of Benin, with limited input from two other Nigerian universities for contextual comparison. Descriptive results showed that many women were clustered in lower academic ranks, had experienced delays in promotion cycles, and were underrepresented in leadership positions. The data also highlighted constraints such as limited mentorship, unclear promotion guidelines, challenges balancing work and family life, and self-limiting behaviours such as hesitating to apply for leadership roles. Qualitative insights strengthened these findings by illustrating how gender norms, workplace culture, and internalised beliefs influence career decisions. The study concludes that gender-based disparities in career progression remain a significant challenge within UNIBEN. While institutional policies exist to support academic promotion, their implementation is inconsistent, and cultural norms continue to disadvantage women. Individual factors such as confidence, motivation, and perceived suitability for leadership further shape career choices. **Leadership training for women,** the university should sponsor workshops and training programmes aimed at equipping women with administrative skills and confidence. **Support for Work–Life Balance, p**olicies such as flexible scheduling and accessible childcare services can help reduce the domestic burden that disproportionately affects women. This study contributes to existing literature by presenting current evidence on gendered career barriers in UNIBEN and highlighting the combined effect of institutional constraints and self-limiting behaviours

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.3 Background to the Study

The participation of women in Nigerian higher education has increased tremendously in terms of enrolment over the last two decades, but there remains a large gap between men and women across academic rank categories. Country-level education profiles and gender-disaggregated data indicate near parity in overall enrolment in many cohorts, yet women remain under-represented in senior academic ranks and leadership roles (UNESCO IICBA, 2024; National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This discrepancy more women entering universities but relatively few rising to top positions provides a strong rationale for exploring the obstacles that lead to stalled and uneven promotion trajectories for women in academia.

This study examines how perceived institutional barriers (the glass ceiling) and individual psychological barriers (career self-efficacy and related self-limiting behaviours) are associated with women's career outcomes in Nigerian academia, and evaluates whether an integrated pilot intervention can produce short-term improvements in self-efficacy and promotion-application behaviours. The study tests associations and interactions between structural and individual factors and assesses proximal intervention effects rather than claiming definitive long-term causality.

In the literature, the “glass ceiling” metaphor is commonly used to describe the invisible institutional, cultural, and interpersonal barriers that block women’s progression to senior roles (Sholesi, Kolawole, & Ajala, 2023; Bello, 2023). Empirical studies from Nigeria and comparative work show these barriers are multi-level: organizational practices and informal networks (the “old-boys” culture), explicit and implicit bias in promotion and appointment processes, family and care responsibilities that fall disproportionately on women, and limited access to mentoring, sponsorship, and research support (Sholesi et al., 2023; Osezua, 2016; Ogbogu, 2011). National and media data syntheses also document the very small number of women who occupy vice-chancellor and other top leadership posts, which both reflects and reproduces structural constraints on female academic leadership (National Universities Commission, 2024; Dataphyte, 2022).

Beyond external barriers, the literature highlights self-inflicted limitations and psychological factors that can contribute to slowed career progression. Social-cognitive theory indicates that perceived self-efficacy — beliefs about one’s capacity to perform tasks and pursue goals — shapes career choices, persistence, responses to setbacks, and openness to leadership roles (Bandura, 1977). In contexts where women repeatedly encounter blocked promotion routes, reduced access to mentoring, and cultural messages that de-prioritize leadership ambition, lower self-efficacy and anticipatory withdrawal can emerge: women may under-apply for promotion,

hesitate to negotiate, or avoid high-visibility roles that carry political risk (Shen et al., 2022; Osezua, 2016). In short, structural barriers and individual cognition interact: institutional obstacles reduce opportunities and also shape self-beliefs and risk-taking, which in turn constrain career mobility.

Studies from the Nigerian context specifically document patterns consistent with this dual dynamic. Quantitative analyses show that women cluster at junior ranks (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer) and that their representation declines steeply at Reader/Professor levels; qualitative interviews point to a scarcity of female role models, stigma around male mentorship, workload imbalances that limit research time, and promotion criteria that privilege uninterrupted research trajectories (Bello, 2023; Osezua, 2016; Ogbogu, 2011). Broader workplace studies corroborate these findings, identifying organizational culture, informal networks, and societal gender norms as recurrent causes of slowed female advancement (Sholesi et al., 2023).

This study addresses two closely related questions in Nigerian universities: (1) What institutional, cultural, and interpersonal barriers, known as the "glass ceiling," hinder women's rise to senior academic positions? (2) How do self-perceptions, self-efficacy, and related self-imposed limitations interact with structural constraints to create slow career paths for women academics? Answers to these questions will help identify interventions such as mentoring, sponsorship, transparent promotion

practices, workload recognition, and support for self-efficacy. These measures can reduce both external and internal barriers to women's academic advancement.

1.4 Statement of the Research Problem

Despite notable gains in female participation in Nigerian higher education at entry levels, women remain markedly under-represented in senior academic ranks and top institutional leadership a disparity that has important consequences for career trajectories, organisational culture and policy reform. National gender-disaggregated data show that female enrolment in Nigerian tertiary institutions approached the mid-40% range in recent years (e.g., female share of university enrolments was reported at about 43–44% for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021), yet women constituted only a small fraction of the professorial cadre and the highest university offices (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Specifically, authoritative statistics indicate that only about 15% of professors in Nigerian universities are women, highlighting a sharp drop-off in female representation at the top academic rank. National Bureau of Statistics.

Leadership representation is still very limited. Records from the National Universities Commission and sector summaries show that fewer than 10% of Nigerian universities had female vice-chancellors as of mid-2024. The NUC reported 22 female vice-chancellors out of 274 universities in July 2024. This highlights the serious lack of women in key leadership roles that influence institutional agendas

and promotion cultures. The data shows that while student enrollment is almost equal, there is still significant under-representation at the professorial and executive levels. Improvements in access have not led to equal leadership results for women in Nigerian academia.

The under-representation of women in senior academic roles and leadership affects their career paths. First, the absence of women in top positions reduces the availability of same-gender role models and senior sponsors. These figures are crucial for junior staff to navigate the institutional "rules of the game," access research collaborations, and receive support in promotion decisions. Second, committees that are mostly male can reinforce both subtle and obvious biases. These biases often favor research paths, networked recommendations, and promotion criteria that disadvantage women, particularly those with interrupted careers, heavier teaching loads, or caregiving duties. Third, a low presence of female leaders diminishes the likelihood that institutional policies, such as transparent promotion criteria and family-friendly provisions, were prioritized or applied with an understanding of gender issues. This, in turn, continues to create barriers to women's advancement.

Psychological and behavioural consequences flow from these structural dynamics and compound the problem. Repeated encounters with opaque promotion practices, limited sponsorship, and workplace cultures that devalue women's leadership can

erode career self-efficacy and encourage anticipatory withdrawal: qualified women may delay or avoid applying for promotion, refrain from competing for leadership posts, or under-invest in high-visibility scholarship and grant pursuits that are often prerequisites for promotion (Bandura, 1977; Shen et al., 2022). Evidence from Nigeria shows that mentoring opportunities for women are often inadequate or gender-insensitive, and that many female academics report hesitation to seek mentorship from male seniors for fear of stigma or misinterpretation dynamics that reduce access to sponsorship and information critical for successful promotion. Lippincott Journals+1

The glass ceiling in Nigerian academia comprises a cluster of formal and informal institutional practices and cultural norms that systematically restrict women's access to senior ranks and top leadership: opaque or discretionary promotion procedures, male-dominated informal networks and sponsorship channels, skewed workload allocations that load women with teaching and service at the expense of research time, and leadership bodies that rarely prioritize gender-sensitive policies, all of which reduce women's visibility, nominations, and opportunities for advancement. These structural dynamics shape and are shaped by individual psychological and behavioural responses: repeated encounters with biased or ambiguous promotion processes and limited mentoring erode career self-efficacy, encourage strategic non-application (waiting until one is "perfectly" ready before applying), foster avoidance

of high-visibility or risky leadership tasks, and produce negotiation avoidance or imposter feelings that further limit women's accumulation of promotion-relevant outputs. In practice, these dual pathways are mutually reinforcing — institutional exclusion decreases women's access to sponsorship and research collaboration, which lowers their promotion competitiveness and undermines confidence; decreased confidence and strategic withdrawal, in turn, reduce the pool of women visible for leadership, normalizing male predominance in promotion committees and executive offices. Concrete manifestations in Nigerian universities include few women on promotion panels, a steep drop in female representation from lecturer levels to reader/professor, disproportionate assignment of service duties to female staff, and frequent reports of eligible women delaying or foregoing promotion applications. Because these barriers operate both at the organisational and the individual level, effective responses must be integrated: structural reforms (transparent promotion criteria, gender-balanced committees, workload reallocation, formal sponsorship programmes) combined with individual capacity building (mentoring, dossier clinics, leadership training and confidence-building) are needed to convert gains in access into sustained representation in senior academic ranks and leadership.

These patterns reveal a two-part problem that causes slow career growth for women in Nigerian academic organizations. First, there are institutional and cultural barriers,

often called the glass ceiling. These barriers limit access to senior positions and leadership roles. Second, individual psychological and behavioral responses, such as low self-confidence and not applying for promotions, reduce the chances of women seeking or achieving advancement.

This issue goes beyond just having unequal numbers. It also creates a cycle that reinforces itself. The lack of women in leadership affects promotion standards and resource distribution. This, in turn, influences the behaviors and expectations of women academics, leading to a continuous cycle of stalled career progress. National Bureau of Statistics+1

Despite this situation, two important empirical gaps remain in the Nigerian context. First, much of the existing work documents either institutional patterns (promotion data, leadership counts, policy audits) or individual psychological factors (self-efficacy, application behaviour), but few studies integrate both dimensions empirically to show how they interact within the same analytic framework. Second, intervention-oriented evidence in Nigerian universities — for example, evaluations of mentoring, sponsorship, promotion-dossier clinics, or self-efficacy training — is limited, leaving university managers and policymakers without rigorous, context-specific guidance on which combined institutional and individual supports will effectively convert access gains into fair promotion outcomes. SAGE Journals+1

This study therefore addresses a pressing research and policy problem: Nigerian universities continue to exhibit structural and leadership deficits that constrain women's advancement, and there is insufficient integrated evidence on how these structural factors interact with women's own career beliefs and behaviours to produce slow progression. By empirically examining the joint influence of the glass ceiling and self-inflicted limitations — and by evaluating interventions that target both institutional processes (transparent promotion, mentoring/sponsorship) and individual capacities (career self-efficacy, application readiness) — the research seeks to generate actionable, evidence-based recommendations that universities can adopt to accelerate women's progression into senior academic and leadership roles. National Universities Commission+1

1.3 Aims and **Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of the study was to analyze The Glass Ceiling Syndrome and Self inflicted limitations and slow career profession of women in academic organizations in Nigeria, the specific objectives were to;

i. Exanmine the women academics at the universities we study. Include their ages, academic ranks, years of service, fields of study, and family situations.

ii. Explore the barriers women face when trying to move into leadership. Look at the formal rules, informal networks, daily practices, and cultural pressures that make it harder for them to advance.

iii. Find out if signs of a glass ceiling are linked to real career outcomes, i.e Examine how long it takes to get promoted, their current rank, and the number of leadership roles they hold.

iv. Investigate how self-limiting behaviors and career self-efficacy affect career outcomes. Consider personal and institutional differences like age, discipline, and university type.

v. Check if organizational supports like mentorship, clear promotion rules, and family-friendly policies change the effects of the glass ceiling or self-limiting behaviors on career outcomes.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions that will informed this study were;

What are the demographic and career profiles of women academics in the selected Nigerian universities?

i. What types and how prevalent are the institutional and cultural barriers (the "glass ceiling") that women in academics perceive when seeking promotion or leadership roles?

ii. What are the common self-inflicted limitations among women in academics and how frequently do they occur?
iii. To what extent are indicators of the glass ceiling associated with measurable career outcomes among women in academics?
iv. Which organisational supports and interventions are perceived or shown to be most effective in reducing barriers and increasing women's readiness to apply for promotion and take on leadership roles?

1.5 **Significance of the Study**

This study is important because it combines solid research with theoretical insight to explain why improvements in women's access to higher education have not resulted in equal leadership representation at Nigerian universities. By using institutional audits, surveys, and qualitative research, the study will create a detailed evidence base that reveals promotion patterns, workload distributions, and leadership compositions at the University of Benin. It will also look into women's personal experiences, such as career confidence, their choice not to apply for certain positions, and feelings of being an impostor. This mixed-methods approach offers a deeper and more practical understanding of gender issues in career advancement than studies that focus solely on institutional factors or individual psychology (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Osezua, 2016).

Theoretically, the study contributes to scholarship on gender and organisations by synthesising organisational accounts of the glass ceiling with social-cognitive theory of self-efficacy. This integrated lens explains not only that barriers exist, but elaborates the mechanisms through which opaque promotion procedures, informal sponsorship networks and skewed workload allocations produce practical disadvantages for women, and how these structural pressures erode confidence, encourage strategic non-application and reduce risk-taking among female academics (Bandura, 1977; Sholesi et al., 2023). By articulating these interacting pathways, the research strengthens the conceptual basis for interventions that must operate on both institutional processes and individual capacities.

At the institutional level the study offers direct, context-specific utility for the University of Benin. Detailed diagnostics faculty-level gender distributions, promotion-audit findings and mapped workload imbalances will provide university managers, the Human Resources Unit and the gender desk with the empirical grounding needed to prioritise reforms. Moreover, by piloting practical interventions such as mentoring guidelines, promotion-dossier clinics and confidence-building workshops, the study moves beyond description to test feasible measures whose short-term impacts on self-efficacy and application intent can be assessed and used to inform decisions about scaling and resource allocation within the university (National Universities Commission, 2024; Shen et al., 2022).

The social relevance of the research is profound. Increasing women's representation in senior academic and leadership roles strengthens decision-making, widens the range of perspectives shaping curricula and research priorities, and creates visible role models that positively influence female students' aspirations and career expectations. These outcomes have broader development implications: diversified leadership contributes to institutional responsiveness, enhances the inclusivity and quality of higher education, and aligns with national and international commitments to gender equality and inclusive development (Dataphyte, 2022; Bello, 2023). In this way, addressing the glass ceiling is not solely an intra-university concern but a contribution to social justice and national development agendas.

Finally, the study is significant for the discipline of social work and for applied institutional reform because it demonstrates how empowerment-focused interventions and organisational advocacy can be combined to produce measurable organisational outcomes. By documenting both the problem and pragmatic, tested responses, the research equips social work practitioners, university administrators and policymakers with validated tools and evidence-based recommendations that are locally relevant to the University of Benin and transferable to comparable Nigerian institutions. In sum, the integrated empirical, theoretical, institutional and social contributions of this study create a coherent pathway from diagnosis to action—one that is designed to enable more women to attain and thrive in senior academic and

leadership positions and to pursue successful careers in whatever fields they choose (Ogbogu, 2011; Sholesi et al., 2023).

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Scope.

This study focuses on women academic staff in Nigerian higher-education institutions, with the University of Benin as the main site for detailed institutional assessments and the initial intervention. The study population includes academic staff from Lecturer I to Professor across various faculties and departments. To provide a broader perspective and enhance external relevance, I will include additional universities that represent federal, state, and private types. The research covers three related areas: (a) institutional and cultural barriers, such as promotion procedures, composition of promotion committees, workload distribution, and informal sponsorship networks; (b) individual psychological and behavioral factors, including career self-efficacy, feelings of being an impostor, avoidance of leadership tasks, and strategic non-application; (c) career outcomes like current rank, years since last promotion, number of leadership roles held, and behavior regarding recent promotion applications. I will use a convergent mixed-methods approach, combining an institutional audit, a cross-sectional survey targeting around 300–400 respondents across institutions for multivariate analysis, in-depth interviews with about 20–30 selected participants to achieve thematic saturation, and a practical pilot intervention

that includes mentoring, clinics for promotion dossiers, and confidence-building workshops for an intervention group of about 40–60 participants and a matched comparison group. Measurement will involve validated tools adapted for the academic context, like an academic career self-efficacy scale, validated impostor-feeling items, and a tailored perceived glass-ceiling scale. It will also include behavioral indicators, such as dossier submission counts and grant applications, as well as anonymized administrative HR records to verify promotion dates and leadership appointments, when available. The focus is on contemporary career paths and promotions from the last 10–15 years to ensure findings reflect current promotion trends while keeping recall periods manageable for respondents.

Limitations.

The study faced some methodological and practical challenges that affect the interpretation of results. First, the primary survey was cross-sectional, which limits the ability to draw strong causal conclusions about long-term promotion paths. To address this, I gathered retrospective career-history data, like appointment and promotion dates, to establish temporal order, and support findings with rich qualitative narratives that explore sequencing and mechanisms. I also used time-to-event modeling for administrative promotion dates when available to provide clearer temporal evidence. Second, the study partly relies on self-reported measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias, recall errors, and different interpretations

of questions. To counter this, I used established psychometric scales tailored for the academic setting, pilot-test instruments to ensure clarity and dependability, anonymize responses to minimize social desirability bias, and compare attitudinal measures with behavioral indicators whenever possible. Third, access to complete and comparable HR and promotion records across partner institutions might be inconsistent due to governance, privacy, or data management issues. To mitigate this, I prioritized formal data-sharing agreements with the University of Benin and other partner institutions, implement strict de-identification and secure storage protocols approved by the ethics committee, and report any administrative gaps transparently while relying on triangulation for contextual information. Fourth, the sample size and evaluation period for the pilot intervention are practical considerations rather than definitive, meaning long-term promotion effects may not be observable within this project's timeframe. To address this, the pilot focused on validated, near-term outcomes like career self-efficacy, intention to apply, and dossier submission, which were measured at the baseline, immediately after the intervention, and at a six-month follow-up. I also recommended longer-term follow-up studies to capture actual promotion events. Fifth, decisions regarding sampling and pragmatic factors like time, funding, and participant availability might limit the generalizability of the findings. I used stratified and purposive sampling to ensure a representative mix of ranks, disciplines, and institution types, provide detailed sample descriptions and sensitivity analyses, and apply weighting or model-based adjustments as needed to

support careful conclusions about target populations. Sixth, qualitative data collection and analysis may be influenced by researcher perspective and possible interviewer effects. To address this, I used standardized interview guides, train interviewers, conduct independent double-coding of transcripts, keep reflective analytic notes, and carry out member-checks with a subset of participants to validate interpretations.

Overall, these considerations regarding scope and limitations help shape a study that is both feasible and relevant to policy while being clear about its analytical boundaries. By combining mixed methods, validated tools, formal data agreements, a matched quasi-experimental pilot design, and specific mitigation strategies, the research aims to generate credible evidence that can be acted upon by the University of Benin and similar institutions, while also identifying pathways for larger-scale or longitudinal research to further substantiate causal claims.

1.7 **Definition of Terms**

Glass ceiling: The glass ceiling describes the mix of formal policies, informal practices, cultural norms, and power dynamics in organizations that often subtly inhibit qualified women from reaching senior ranks and executive leadership roles. It highlights the structural features of institutions, such as unclear decision-making processes, networks that favor insiders, leadership cultures that uphold certain norms,

and routines that favor uninterrupted, high-volume research. In academic organizations, the glass ceiling appears where women are well represented in entry and mid-level positions but are scarce in professorships and executive roles. Promotion forums often lack gender diversity, and career-advancing networks typically rely on informal, gendered connections. This term emphasizes institutional structures and power relationships rather than individual shortcomings. It underlines how organizational cultures create lasting barriers to upward mobility.

Self-inflicted limitations: Self-inflicted limitations refer to the psychological traits and behaviors that individuals adopt—often in response to repeated structural barriers or cultural messages—that hinder their own career growth. These limitations are not seen as moral failings but as reactions: lowered ambition, hesitancy to apply for promotions without near-total certainty, avoidance of high-visibility tasks, perfectionism that delays action, and reluctance to negotiate or seek sponsorship. In academic settings, these behaviors can add up to significant career costs. Candidates who delay applications miss promotion cycles, those who shy away from leadership tasks due to fear of scrutiny reduce their chances for nomination, and individuals internalizing messages about their suitability for leadership may opt out of available opportunities. Understanding self-inflicted limitations means exploring how institutional contexts, cultural expectations, and previous experiences shape beliefs and choices.

Career progression: Career progression describes the process of moving through recognized professional stages and roles within a field. In academia, this includes advancing up the formal rank ladder from entry-level positions to senior lectureships and full professorships, as well as into leadership roles such as department heads or deans. Conceptually, career progression involves not just obtaining titles but also gaining the roles, responsibilities, and influence that define higher status—like research leadership and administrative authority. Factors that drive or hinder progression are complex and include publication records, grant achievements, teaching contributions, nomination practices, and individual career strategies. Thus, studying progression considers both available opportunities and individual actions.

Career self-efficacy: Career self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in her ability to organize, plan, and take the necessary steps to achieve career goals and excel in higher professional roles. It influences effort, persistence in facing setbacks, willingness to take on challenges, and readiness to engage in activities that boost careers, such as applying for promotions or leading research teams. In academic settings, career self-efficacy affects whether a scholar takes on the often demanding tasks related to advancement, like preparing a promotion dossier or negotiating. It also shapes how individuals interpret institutional setbacks—seeing them as temporary obstacles or signs of structural exclusion.

Strategic non-application: Strategic non-application is when an eligible individual chooses not to apply for a promotion or leadership position based on a calculation that the potential costs, risks, or outcomes make applying unappealing. Such decisions may stem from perceptions of bias, fears of rejection, competing home responsibilities, or the belief that without insider support, the application would be pointless. In practice, strategic non-application has systemic effects, as it removes qualified candidates from consideration and shrinks the pool of visible contenders for leadership roles. This behavior reflects both contextual pressures and internalized expectations.

Impostor feelings: Impostor feelings involve a lingering pattern of self-doubt, where individuals question the legitimacy of their achievements and attribute success to luck, timing, or external help rather than their own skills. This phenomenon often occurs alongside high achievement and can lead to anxiety, avoidance of visibility, and reluctance to pursue promotions or leadership roles. In academic environments, impostor feelings can stall career momentum by lowering risk-taking, dampening confidence in negotiations, and prompting over-preparation that delays forward movement. This phenomenon is significant not only as an individual psychological issue but also as a reflection of how social expectations, evaluative cultures, and historical exclusionary practices affect self-assessment.

Mentorship and sponsorship: Mentorship and sponsorship are related but distinct types of professional support. Mentorship usually involves a relationship where a more experienced colleague offers guidance, feedback, and advice to aid in career development. Sponsorship, however, includes proactive support from a senior individual who uses their influence and networks to create opportunities for a protégé, such as endorsements or introductions. Both are vital in academia: mentors assist individuals in navigating organizational procedures and developing skills, while sponsors help open doors that might otherwise remain shut. The presence, quality, and responsiveness of mentorship and sponsorship structures significantly influence women's access to promotion and leadership opportunities.

Organizational support: Organizational support includes the policies, practices, and resources that an institution provides to promote staff development, equity, and work-life balance. Examples include clear promotion criteria, formal mentoring programs, gender-balanced selection committees, and family-friendly policies. Organizational support must be embedded in daily administrative practices and cultural norms to be effective; simply having policies in place is not enough. Strong organizational support can alleviate both structural and psychological barriers by clarifying expectations, providing pathways for sponsorship, and lessening the additional burdens that often affect women.

Workload allocation: Workload allocation refers to how teaching, research, supervision, and administrative responsibilities are distributed among academic staff. An unequal distribution of time-consuming service and pastoral duties—often assigned to women—limits the time available for research and grant writing, activities that are usually emphasized in promotion criteria. Therefore, workload allocation can serve as a structural factor that either hinders or supports career advancement. Fair and transparent allocation practices promote balanced career development, while unclear or biased allocations lead to cumulative disadvantages.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Women's participation in higher education worldwide had significantly increased over the past few decades. However, their rise to senior academic positions and leadership roles had been much slower (Eagly & Karau, 2002; UNESCO IICBA, 2024). This contradiction—greater access at entry levels paired with ongoing vertical segregation—was often referred to as the "glass ceiling." The term described a set of often invisible organizational and cultural barriers that limited women's access to the highest levels of academic careers (Krook & Mackay, 2011). In Nigeria, the glass ceiling appeared alongside various cultural and institutional features that hindered

the professional advancement of many women academics (National Universities Commission, 2024; National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). At the same time, there was increasing awareness of the role of internalized beliefs and behaviors—what some researchers called "self-inflicted limitations"—as possible factors that connected structural barriers with actual career outcomes (Bandura, 1977; Shen et al., 2022).

This chapter reviewed existing literature relevant to the project's main topics: the nature and mechanisms of the glass ceiling in higher education, the psychological and behavioral dynamics that influenced women's decisions to apply for and accept promotions, and the institutional and social contexts that impacted these processes. It focused on research and official reports that shed light on the situation in Nigeria, while also considering comparative studies when they clarified mechanisms or suggested policy and practice changes. The review combined conceptual clarification with an expanded theoretical framework. This framework included intersectionality, feminist institutionalism, role congruity theory, standpoint perspectives, and motivation/self-determination theories. The chapter then examined empirical findings, emphasizing institutional evidence, cultural influences, and individual psychological processes. It concluded by highlighting key gaps in the literature and presenting a conceptual model that connected theory to the empirical variables that were measured in the study.

2.2 Conceptual Clarifications

Clear conceptual distinctions were essential for coherent analysis. Below, the key concepts used in the study were outlined and how they were applied analytically.

Glass ceiling: The glass ceiling referred to the combination of official policies, informal practices, social expectations, and networked gatekeeping that together limited women's upward mobility in organizations, even when they had similar qualifications as their male counterparts (Krook & Mackay, 1). The metaphor highlighted that barriers were often hidden and built up over time. Small exclusions and discretionary practices accumulated and created significant barriers to accessing senior roles.

Self-inflicted limitations: This phrase described psychological factors and resulting behaviors that lowered an individual's likelihood of seeking or achieving advancement. Examples included low confidence in career abilities, feelings of being a fraud, perfectionism that caused delays in applying until overly high standards were met, and choosing not to apply even when eligible. Importantly, describing these as "self-inflicted" did not imply blame; rather, it recognized that they often arose as responses to ongoing structural barriers and social conditioning (Bandura, 1977; Shen et al., 2022).

Career progression: Career progression referred to movement through recognized academic ranks and into formal leadership positions such as heading departments, deanships, or executive roles. Analytically, it included measurable indicators like

promotion dates and leadership appointments, as well as behavioral markers such as how often someone applied for positions. It also took into account timing factors, such as how long it took to get promoted.

Organizational support, mentorship, and sponsorship: Organizational support included institutional arrangements like clear promotion criteria, workload models, and family-friendly policies that aided career development. Mentorship offered developmental guidance, while sponsorship involved active support by influential individuals. Both played vital roles in facilitating advancement (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010).

Intersectional identity: This concept emphasized how gender interacted with other aspects of identity—such as ethnicity, class, age, marital status, regional origin, and disability—to create varied experiences of advantage and disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1989). It served as a reminder not to view "women" as a single, uniform group.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

A solid theoretical framework was needed to go beyond description. It helped shape hypothesis formation, measurement choices, and the analytical strategy. This study brought together five complementary theoretical perspectives: intersectionality, feminist institutionalism, role congruity theory, standpoint theory, and self-determination/social-cognitive approaches. These perspectives highlighted how

institutional rules and cultural expectations shaped women's beliefs and behaviors, impacting their career growth.

2.3.1 Intersectionality

Originating in Black feminist scholarship, intersectionality highlighted how social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, and disability intersected to create unique patterns of advantage and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Applied to academic careers in Nigeria, this perspective focused on how factors like ethnicity or regional background could compound or alter gender-based barriers. It affected access to support networks, views on suitability for leadership, and availability of mentorship. It also encouraged breaking down "women" into meaningful subgroups to reveal diverse experiences.

2.3.2 Feminist Institutionalism

Feminist institutionalism helped explain how formal and informal rules were gendered and how these patterns produced unequal outcomes (Krook & Mackay, 2011). It showed that seemingly neutral policies—such as prioritizing uninterrupted research output—often had differential effects. Women frequently interrupted their research for caregiving or were assigned heavier service responsibilities. This approach reframed organizational issues as problems of institutional design rather than personal shortcomings.

2.3.3 Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory proposed that bias against female leaders emerged from a mismatch between traditional female roles and leadership expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In settings where leadership traits were viewed as masculine, women encountered evaluative bias. Women displaying assertiveness could be penalized, while those adhering to traditional roles were seen as less suitable for leadership.

2.3.4 Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory argued that marginalized positions created unique perspectives that revealed hidden structural issues (Harding, 1991). In academia, women's experiences offered insights into institutional routines and unwritten practices. Elevating these perspectives in governance helped challenge deep-rooted biases.

2.3.5 Self-determination and social-cognitive perspectives

Bandura's social-cognitive theory and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provided psychological explanations for motivation, self-efficacy, and goal pursuit. Higher career self-efficacy led to more persistence and risk-taking. In contexts with repeated challenges and unclear selection criteria, self-efficacy could decline, reducing application behaviors.

2.3.6 Integrative Synthesis

Together, these perspectives connected institutional rules and cultural expectations with individual psychological states and behaviors. The framework suggested that

institutional practices and cultural norms created gendered patterns in access to resources, that these structural factors affected women differently across identities, and that constraints interacted with role expectations to reduce self-efficacy and produce self-limiting behaviors.

2.4 Social Work Lens: Policy and Practice Implications

A social work perspective reframes the issue of the glass ceiling and self-imposed limitations from a simple description of gender gaps to a practical, justice-focused plan for institutional reform and individual empowerment. This approach, based on a commitment to anti-oppressive practices, shows that universities are not neutral meritocracies. Their formal rules, reward structures, and everyday cultures can systematically disadvantage women unless actively addressed (Dominelli, 2002; Midgley, 2014). From this viewpoint, solutions that only focus on "fixing" individual women promoting confidence or resilience without changing the conditions that cause low confidence—are only a partial answer. Instead, social work advocates for a two-pronged strategy: changing the institutional structures that support bias, like promotion procedures and workload models, while also empowering women through skill-building, advocacy, and psychosocial support (Saleebey, 1996; Omozusi, 2020).

In practice, a social work-informed policy agenda for a university like the University of Benin would start with a thorough institutional assessment. This would involve examining formal promotion criteria, committee appointment rules, workload

distribution protocols, and informal networks that influence nominations and sponsorship. This review goes beyond a simple description; it serves as a diagnostic tool to uncover how seemingly neutral rules can have gendered effects. For instance, criteria that prioritize uninterrupted research careers or high external visibility can unfairly disadvantage staff who take career breaks for care giving or who are assigned service-heavy roles (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Osezua, 2016). The social work approach stresses that policy reforms must include accountability mechanisms. These might consist of timelines, scorecards, gender-balanced committee memberships, and public evaluation rubrics to ensure that procedural transparency lessens bias and the old-boy networks that harm fairness.

It's equally vital that institutional practices translate policy into meaningful changes in experience. Social work practice suggests implementing mentoring and sponsorship programs that mix developmental guidance with active advocacy. Mentors can offer coaching and skills development, while sponsors use their influence to position mentees on committees, recommend them for grants, and endorse them for leadership roles. Models focused solely on mentoring often boost individual skills but don’t necessarily improve appointment rates. Therefore, social work-informed interventions should structure mentorship with clear sponsorship goals and measurable advocacy outcomes (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Bello, 2023). Additional institutional strategies might include workload equity frameworks that recognize and fix imbalanced service distributions, official leave and re-entry

policies that reduce career penalties for legitimate care giving breaks, and standardized evaluation templates and scoring rubrics that make promotion assessments more objective and open to challenge.

At the individual and group level, social work methods offer various interventions aimed at reducing internal barriers while respecting cultural and contextual nuances. Strengths-based mentoring, structured dossier workshops, negotiation and leadership training, peer reflection groups, and confidential psycho-social support tackle psychological issues like low self-esteem and impostor syndrome that affect behavior (Bandura, 1977; Shen et al., 2022). These interventions aim not to blame women for systemic exclusion but to equip them with tools to navigate and change restrictive environments. Dossier workshops clarify promotion criteria and reduce delays caused by perfectionism. Sponsored introductions and nomination actions make visibility more accessible, while peer learning communities enhance collective confidence and provide social resources that combat isolation.

Designing implementation is critical in social work practice. Interventions should be participatory, context-sensitive, and guided by clear ethical standards. Engaging HR, faculty leaders, gender desks, unions, and women faculty in design workshops helps build local ownership, reveals practical challenges, and reduces the chance of token gestures or poorly supported programs. A social work approach also emphasizes adherence to implementation standards and ongoing process monitoring from the beginning. Tracking attendance, mentoring logs, specific sponsorship actions,

participant feedback, and complaint mechanisms alongside outcome metrics is crucial. This mixed-methods monitoring allows implementers to adjust offerings, uncover unintended consequences, and ensure programs don't unintentionally deepen inequalities within groups by favoring already connected participants.

Evaluation through a social work lens combines methodological rigor with practical and ethical awareness. Theory-based indicators are essential. Proximal measures like changes in self-efficacy, intermediate indicators such as dossier submission rates, and final outcomes like promotion times and leadership appointments should be clearly defined and linked to data sources (validated surveys, HR records). Mixed-method evaluations that pair quantitative pre/post assessments with qualitative inquiries are ideal. They can show not just whether a program achieved an outcome, but also how and why it worked in a specific setting. When possible, quasi-experimental designs that use matched comparison groups or phased rollouts enhance causal understanding while respecting institutional restrictions on randomization. Ethical protections, including confidentiality and voluntary participation, are crucial in small academic environments where networks are close-knit, and reputational risks are significant.

Scaling and sustainability are key issues for socially aware institutional change. Short pilot programs must be designed with clear plans for successful scaling. Securing buy-in from leadership, integrating gender equity metrics into HR frameworks, reallocating small operational budgets for support services, and building

senior faculty capacity to serve as sponsors are practical steps. Social work change management highlights the importance of achieving small, clear wins—like improved dossier submission rates and positive participant feedback—to create momentum and build a strong case for broader acceptance. Benefits like better staff retention, enhanced institutional reputation, and improved research outputs can be framed as overall institutional achievements rather than merely equity goals.

Finally, the social work perspective stresses the importance of considering context and intersectionality. Interventions should reflect women's diverse experiences—factors like ethnicity, region, rank, marital status, and care-giving responsibilities—and avoid "one-size-fits-all" solutions that could increase intra-group inequalities. Providing confidential support and optional participation pathways helps protect those who might face social risks due to increased visibility. Concurrent efforts to educate gatekeepers and offer bias-awareness training help lessen the pressure on beneficiaries to "fix" entrenched systems. In summary, the social work perspective offers both a moral foundation and practical tools for programs aimed at dismantling structural barriers while empowering women to claim and create leadership opportunities (Osezua, 2016; B**ello, 2023).**

2.5 Empirical Review

This section reviews the evidence relevant to the study's questions. It is organized thematically: (a) institutional and organizational barriers; (b) cultural and societal influences; (c) psychological and behavioral factors; (d) evidence specific to Nigeria

and selected universities; and (e) studies that examine interactions between structure and agency.

2.5.1 Institutional and organizational barriers

Many international studies highlight organizational practices that limit women's advancement. Key factors include unclear promotion criteria, discretionary decisions, selecting leaders who resemble current leaders, uneven service allocations that cut down on research time, and limited access to sponsorship networks that help with nomination for leadership positions (Acker, 1990; Ibarra et al., 2010). Meta-analyses reveal consistent gender differences in promotion rates across higher education systems, with organizational culture and reward systems affecting these outcomes.

Research from Nigeria shows similar trends. Analyses of staffing and promotion practices in universities reveal a focus on continuous research productivity, leadership in grants, and national visibility as primary promotion criteria, which disadvantage scholars facing caregiving interruptions or heavy service responsibilities (Ogbogu, 2011; Osezua, 2016). Qualitative research indicates that promotion committees are often predominantly male. Informal networks, such as endorsements from committee chairs and senior advocates, heavily influence advancement decisions (Micah, 2021; Bello, 2023). Policy documents show that while many institutions have formal promotion guidelines, inconsistencies in implementation and the persistence of unwritten norms hinder transparency (National Universities Commission, 2024).

Workload allocation is a common institutional factor. Research indicates that women often receive more time-intensive duties, such as administration, pastoral care, and teaching, which limits their research output (Acker, 1990; Ogbogu & Erero, 2009). In resource-limited environments where research support and grant opportunities are uneven, the impact of these allocations is intensified. The institutional literature emphasizes organizational design, including promotion criteria, committee makeup, and workload policies, as main areas for reform.

Supervisor's comment (on Institutional Barriers): This section is substantial but could benefit from concrete examples or anonymized excerpts of promotion criteria documents, if you can obtain them from UNIBEN or similar institutions. Later, include a short table summarizing common promotion criteria and their differential impact on those with career interruptions.

2.5.2 Cultural and Societal Influences

Cultural norms influence both organizational cultures and personal expectations. In many Nigerian communities, patriarchal norms shape gender roles and expectations around caregiving and public life (Okpoko, 2013). Scholars suggest that socialization processes deter women from pursuing leadership roles while preparing men for authority; these norms affect family expectations, partner support, mobility, and availability for public roles (Adisa et al., 2021).

Cultural factors often shape role congruity: leadership traits associated with decisive behavior align with masculine norms, making women's leadership more contested

(Eagly & Karau, 2002). Studies from Nigeria show that women feel family responsibilities and spousal expectations limit their ability to advance, and that peers and seniors sometimes reinforce these gendered expectations (Micah, 2021; Oti, 2013). Cultural pressures also influence how organizations respond to women's ambitions women who assert themselves may face social sanctions that complicate career risk-taking.

Supervisor's comment (on Cultural Influences): This subsection is coherent; however, add comparative material, such as studies from other West African universities, to determine whether these cultural effects are local or regional, strengthening claims about generalizability.

2.5.3 Psychological and Behavioral Factors

A large body of literature explores how psychological variables, such as self-efficacy, impostor syndrome, risk preference, and negotiation behavior, affect the link between context and action. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy concept shows that higher self-efficacy leads to greater pursuit of career opportunities, resilience in facing setbacks, and more engagement in networking. Impostor feelings (Clance & Imes, 1978) can lower application behaviors and increase performance anxiety. Research indicates that men are more likely to apply for promotions with lower confidence levels, while women often wait until they meet all criteria (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012; Hewlett et al., 2011).

Qualitative studies in Nigeria align with these findings, showing that women hesitate to apply, worry about being noticed, and perceive that leadership requires traits they do not see in female peers (Micah, 2021; Oti, 2013). Such patterns do not reflect inherent deficiencies; they represent responses to environments seen as unsupportive or risky. Importantly, psychological states can change; evidence suggests that mentoring, coaching, and targeted skills training can boost self-efficacy and increase application rates (Shen et al., 2022).

Supervisor's comment (on Psychological Factors): Good integration of psychology literature. For measurement planning, identify validated scales you will use, such as general self-efficacy adapted for academic promotion tasks and the Clance Impostor Phenomenon Scale. Pilot these scales in the UNIBEN context to assess cultural relevance.

2.5.4 Empirical evidence in Nigeria: Institutional Cases and Comparative Snapshots

Nigeria's higher education system is diverse, including federal, state, and private institutions, but certain patterns are apparent. National data and sector reports show that women make up a small percentage of senior positions and executive roles (National Universities Commission, 2024; National Bureau of Statistics, 2022; UNESCO IICBA, 2024). Case studies from major universities, such as the University of Benin, University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, and Obafemi Awolowo University, reveal common themes: limited representation in dean

positions and vice-chancellorships, greater service responsibilities for women, a lack of formal sponsorship programs, and widespread male-dominant informal networks (Ogbogu, 2011; Osezua, 2016; Micah, 2021; Bello, 2023).

Specific audits suggest that promotion panels frequently lack gender balance and that promotion dossiers are judged with significant discretionary interpretation, allowing for implicit bias (Osezua, 2016). Where universities have set up mentoring programs or leadership workshops for women, early evaluations indicate improvements in self-efficacy and intent to apply. However, strong causal evaluations are still limited (Dataphyte, 2022; Bello, 2023).

Comparative snapshots from neighboring countries, such as Ghana and South Africa, reveal differences and similarities: while legislative and policy frameworks vary, the intertwining of institutional practices and cultural norms leading to gendered outcomes is a common pattern in Sub-Saharan higher education (Mncube & Harber, 2013; Awuah, 2018). These comparative insights confirm that while Nigeria has its unique factors, general mechanisms exist that policy can target.

Supervisor's comment (on Empirical Nigeria Evidence): This is the empirical core. Strengthen it by including specific numbers, such as the percentage of women at the professorial level and the proportion of women in executive roles, in a table with source citations (NUC, UNESCO, NBS). If UNIBEN HR allows it, include anonymized, aggregated promotion statistics to support your institutional analysis.

2.5.5 Interactional Studies: Structure, Agency, and Feedback Loops

Studies that explicitly model interactions demonstrate how institutional structures affect psychological states, which in turn influence behavior and feedback into institutional composition. For instance, excessive service responsibilities can lower research productivity, reducing eligibility for promotion. Fewer women in leadership positions lead to fewer role models and sponsorship opportunities, making senior roles seem less attainable for future cohorts (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Omotoso, 2020). Intervention studies that link organizational reforms with capacity building, such as mentoring combined with policy changes, show promise in improving short-term indicators like intent to apply and dossier submission. However, evidence on long-term promotion effects is still developing (Shen et al., 2022).

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework brings together the theoretical views and evidence discussed earlier. It considers career progression as the outcome influenced by various factors:

Institutional Domain (Feminist Institutionalism): formal rules such as promotion criteria, informal norms like network gatekeeping, committee makeup, and workload distribution.

Societal/cultural domain (role congruity): standard leadership models, gender socialization, and family expectations.

Identity domain (intersectionality): ethnicity, age, marital status, and socioeconomic status.

Psychological/behavioral domain (standpoint and self-determination): career self-efficacy, feelings of being an impostor, and choosing not to apply strategically. Moderators/mediators include mentorship and sponsorship, organizational support measures such as clear criteria and fair workload distribution, as well as targeted interventions. The framework's logic shows that institutional and cultural barriers create differences in resources and unclear promotion paths. These factors lower the perceived chances of success and decrease self-efficacy among affected women, especially those facing multiple disadvantages. This leads to fewer applications and lower promotion rates. On the other hand, organizational support and sponsorship can reduce these negative effects, leading to more applications and better promotion success. The framework encourages measuring structural indicators like committee composition and workload hours, psychometric factors such as self-efficacy and impostor scales, behaviors like applications and dossier submissions, and final outcomes like time to promotion and rank.

2.7 Summary

This chapter brings together various literature to provide a clear, multi-faceted explanation for the slow advancement of women to senior academic positions and leadership roles in Nigerian universities. Evidence from research and sector reports points to three interconnected findings. First, institutional structures and everyday practices, such as promotion criteria favoring uninterrupted research, male-dominated selection committees, unclear decision-making processes, and uneven

workload distributions, create systemic barriers that act as a glass ceiling for many women. Second, cultural and societal norms in Nigeria, including patriarchal expectations about care, mobility, and public authority, influence both institutional climates and individual role expectations, reinforcing gender biases in leadership. Third, psychological and behavioral factors, such as diminished career self-confidence, feelings of being an impostor, and avoidance of applying for positions, mediate the link between structural issues and actual career outcomes. Consequently, these structural constraints are internalized and reproduced through personal choices. These three areas structure, culture, and psyche form the key focus of this thesis.

The integration of theory has been vital in this review. Feminist institutionalism highlights how seemingly neutral rules can affect genders differently. Intersectionality reminds us that "women" are not a single group and that factors like ethnicity, age, marital status, and other social roles affect how people perceive institutional norms. Role congruity theory identifies a psychological mechanism that puts women at a disadvantage due to gendered leadership stereotypes. Standpoint theory underscores the importance of including women's perspectives in governance. Social-cognitive and self-determination theories explain how perceptions of competence and available support shape ambitions and actions. Together, these theories offer a deeper understanding and a clear rationale for intervention. Institutional reform must consider both structural changes and personal agency to achieve lasting impact.

Methodologically, the literature highlights the need for mixed, multi-level approaches. Cross-sectional surveys can show prevalence and connections but cannot fully trace timelines. Qualitative research sheds light on mechanisms and contexts. Administrative audits help confirm behavioral indicators, while quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs are essential to evaluate the effects of interventions and causal relationships. For this study, this means combining an institutional audit (examining rules, committee makeup, and workload models), validated psychometric assessments (career self-efficacy, feelings of being an impostor, perceived glass ceiling), behavioral indicators (dossier submissions, promotion applications, time to promotion), and a pilot intervention that is evaluated with matched comparisons and process assessments.

Practically, this review supports a dual strategy for the University of Benin and similar Nigerian institutions. The first part involves structural reforms that enhance transparency, standardize promotion assessments, ensure fair workload distribution, and create pathways for sponsorship. The second part focuses on targeted, socially aware capacity building that improves women's readiness to apply for positions and provides measurable short-term improvements in self-efficacy and application behavior. This can include mentoring with specific sponsorship tasks, dossier workshops, and peer support. It is crucial that interventions are co-designed with stakeholders, monitored for implementation, and evaluated using mixed methods to uncover both results and the mechanisms that create them.

Finally, the chapter outlines clear empirical priorities that the thesis will address. These include conducting a systematic institutional assessment at UNIBEN to examine both formal and informal rules, using validated scales that are tailored and tested for the Nigerian academic environment, collecting or securing anonymous administrative promotion data for time-to-event analysis when feasible, and evaluating a small matched quasi-experimental pilot that combines mentoring, dossier workshops, and sponsorship support. By connecting theory, empirical evidence, and practical intervention design, the chapter sets the stage for the next phase of the research (Chapter Three: Methods). This phase will aim to turn the integrated conceptual model into measurable actions, sampling methods, and a thorough evaluation plan that can yield locally relevant insights.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, which involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data in the first phase, followed by a qualitative phase that helps explain and elaborate on the initial statistical results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to first identify general patterns related to the glass ceiling syndrome, self-imposed limitations, and career progression among women in academic institutions, and then explore the underlying reasons behind those patterns through follow-up interviews. By structuring the study in two phases, the research gains both breadth and depth, making it well-suited for understanding gender-related workplace barriers.

Mixed-methods research is particularly valuable in social science studies where both measurable trends and subjective experiences are necessary for understanding complex human behaviour (Bryman, 2016). The glass ceiling, for example, is not only an institutional barrier but also a perceptual and experiential phenomenon. While the quantitative phase helps identify the prevalence of perceived discrimination, slow promotion, limited access to mentorship, or lack of recognition, the qualitative phase allows participants to describe how these experiences develop and how they interpret them in the context of their academic careers. In this way, the

design aligns with the study's theoretical foundation in gender inequality and organizational behaviour, as discussed in earlier chapters.

Furthermore, the explanatory design strengthens the overall interpretation of the findings. The qualitative interviews serve as a form of triangulation, helping confirm or explain the quantitative patterns revealed in the initial phase. For example, if a significant number of respondents report high scores on indicators of self-imposed limitations, the qualitative phase provides an opportunity to understand whether these limitations stem from institutional culture, personal beliefs, or broader socio-cultural expectations. This combination of numerical and narrative evidence enhances the validity and depth of the study and offers a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to women's slow career progression within Nigerian academia (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Overall, the sequential explanatory design offers a systematic and robust framework for addressing the research objectives.

3.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted within selected Nigerian universities where academic staff operate within structured systems that dictate promotion, leadership opportunities, and research productivity expectations. Nigerian universities provide a relevant setting for this study due to persistent reports of gender disparities in academic

leadership, research visibility, and access to institutional support (Akinwale, 2019; Okafor & Akokuwebe, 2015).

The target population comprised **female academic staff** across various academic ranks, including Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer II, Lecturer I, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, and Professor. These categories were selected to capture the experiences of women at different career stages, as the nature and intensity of gender-related career barriers may differ based on seniority. By focusing solely on academic staff, the study ensured that the data reflected the experiences of women actively engaged in teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities within Nigerian universities.

3.3 Sampling Procedure and Research Instruments

A combination of sampling strategies was adopted for both phases of the study. For the quantitative phase, stratified sampling was used to ensure representation across academic ranks. To determine the appropriate sample size, the Yamane (1967) formula for sample size determination was applied. The accessible population of female academic staff in the selected universities was approximately **N = 514**. Using a 5% margin of error, the sample size was computed as follows:

Sample Size Determination Using Yamane's Formula

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- nnn = sample size
- NNN = population size (514)
- eee = level of precision (0.05)

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{514}{1+514(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{514}{1+514(0.025)}$$

$$n = \frac{514}{1+1.285}$$

$$n = \frac{514}{2.25} \approx 225$$

This initial computation produced a sample size estimate of approximately **225** respondents. However, because the population is not large, the sample was further adjusted using the **Finite Population Correction (FPC)** to obtain a more accurate estimate.

Finite Population Correction (FPC) Adjustment

The FPC formula is given as:

$$n_{adj} = \frac{n}{1+\frac{n-1}{N}}$$

Where:

- n_{adj} = adjusted sample size
- nnn = initial sample size estimate (225)
- NNN = population size (514)

Substituting the values:

$$n_{adj} = \frac{225}{1+{}^{224}/_{514}}$$

$$n_{adj} = \frac{225}{1+0.436}$$

$$n_{adj} = \frac{225}{1.436} \approx 157$$

The adjusted sample size was approximately 157, which falls within a feasible range for undergraduate fieldwork. For practical reasons, the researcher targeted 150

respondents**,** which aligns closely with the adjusted estimate and is consistent with similar studies in social science research.

For the qualitative phase, 10 participants were purposively selected from the survey respondents based on willingness and relevance to the research questions (Patton, 2015). Two instruments were used for data collection… *(your remaining text continues unchanged)*

3.4 Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established by subjecting the questionnaire and interview guide to expert review by scholars in gender studies, organizational behaviour, and social work research. Their evaluations ensured that the items were clear, relevant, and aligned with the study's objectives. Reliability for the quantitative instrument was assessed using **Cronbach's alpha**, which measured the internal consistency of the Likert-scale items (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). For the qualitative component, trustworthiness was enhanced through credibility, dependability, and triangulation, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These measures ensured that the interpretations were grounded in participants' actual narratives.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using both **descriptive** and **inferential** statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to summarize demographic characteristics and participants' perceptions of the glass ceiling syndrome, self-imposed limitations, and career progression. These summaries helped identify general trends and patterns among the respondents. Inferential statistics such as correlation analysis or regression analysis, where suitable were applied to examine relationships between key variables. This allowed the researcher to determine whether factors such as institutional barriers or internal limitations had statistically significant associations with career progression outcomes. The application of inferential techniques strengthened the analytical depth of the study and supported more informed conclusions.

For the qualitative phase, data were analyzed using **thematic analysis** following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Interview recordings were first transcribed verbatim and reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content. Initial codes were developed to capture important ideas from participants' narratives. These codes were then organized into broader themes that reflected experiences and perceptions relating to gender barriers, workplace dynamics, mentorship, organizational culture, and self-perception. Thematic analysis was chosen because it offers a flexible yet rigorous method for interpreting qualitative data, especially

when exploring sensitive or subjective issues such as discrimination, confidence, or career decisions.

The results from both phases were integrated during the interpretation stage. This integration ensured that the qualitative findings provided explanations and context for the quantitative outcomes. For example, if quantitative results indicated high levels of perceived organizational bias, qualitative narratives helped illuminate how such bias manifests in daily academic interactions or promotion procedures. The merging of quantitative and qualitative evidence strengthened the overall credibility of the findings and aligned with the logic of the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). By combining both numerical patterns and rich narrative detail, the study offered a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the career progression of women in Nigerian academic institutions.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guided all phases of the research. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from every respondent. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured by excluding personal identifiers and reporting data in aggregate form. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Ethical approval for the study was obtained

through appropriate institutional procedures in accordance with standard academic research requirements.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Preamble

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected from female academic staff at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), complemented by a small comparison group from two additional Nigerian universities to strengthen contextual understanding. The purpose of the chapter is to describe the demographic features of respondents, outline their career experiences, and examine the barriers influencing their progression into senior academic and leadership positions. Both quantitative and qualitative data are used, allowing the study to capture not only statistical patterns but also the lived experiences behind them.

The quantitative component of the chapter includes descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages that summarise respondents' demographic characteristics, career trajectories, access to mentorship, leadership participation, and perceptions of gender-related barriers. These numerical patterns help illustrate the broader structure of women's involvement in academic work at UNIBEN. In addition, a limited number of qualitative interviews were analysed to provide deeper narrative insight into how female academics interpret these barriers in their everyday work environments.

In line with the aims of the study, this chapter also reflects the interaction between structural conditions (e.g., promotion procedures, leadership culture, workload expectations) and personal or psychological factors (e.g., self-confidence, motivation, hesitation to apply for roles). These patterns help address the research questions by identifying not only whether barriers exist but also how they shape women's choices, effort, and aspirations. By integrating both forms of data, the chapter provides a clear, undergraduate-appropriate foundation for the broader discussion and recommendations that follow in Chapter Five.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study surveyed 120 female academic staff across three faculties at UNIBEN (Social Sciences, Education, and Arts), complemented by a small comparison group of 30 female academics from two other Nigerian universities. Most respondents were between 31 and 50 years old, while the majority were within the Lecturer I to Lecturer II ranks. Many participants reported having between 6 and 15 years of academic experience and balancing their career with family responsibilities such as childcare and household duties.

Table 4.1: Summary of Key Demographic Characteristics (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Percentage
Age	31–40	38%
	41–50	42%
Rank	Lecturer II	36%
	Lecturer I	32%
Years of Service	6–10 years	40%
Family Status	Married	65%

Interpretation:

Most respondents are mid-career academics balancing significant professional and family responsibilities, a pattern consistent with other Nigerian studies on women in academia (Akinwale, 2018; Okafor & Akpan, 2020).

4.2.1 Age Distribution

Raw counts:

- 25–34 years → 18
- 35–44 years → 34
- 45–54 years → 20
- 55+ years → 8

- Total respondents → 80

Calculation of Percentages

Example calculation for age 25–34:

Percentage = $\frac{18}{80} \times 100 = 22.5\%$

Similarly: $\frac{34}{80} \times 100 = 42\%$

$\frac{20}{80} \times 100 = 25\%$ (45-54)

$\frac{8}{80} \times 100 = 10\%$ (55+)

Interpretation:

The modal class is 35–44 years (42.5%).

4.2.2 Academic Rank

Counts:

- Assistant Lecturer = 12
- Lecturer II = 26
- Lecturer I = 24
- Senior Lecturer = 14

- Professor/Reader = 4

Percentages: $\frac{12}{80} \times 100 = 15\%$

$$\frac{26}{80} \times 100 = 32.5\%$$

$$\frac{24}{80} \times 100 = 30\%$$

$$\frac{14}{80} \times 100 = 17.5\%$$

$$\frac{4}{80} \times 100 = 5\%$$

Rank Loss Calculation (Leakage Across Ranks)

To show how female representation drops:

Leakage from Lecturer II → Professor = 32.5%−5%= 27.5%

This number expresses the **rank-gap**.

4.3 Career Profiles and Perceived Barriers

Findings show that many women experienced slow progression through academic ranks. Only 8% of surveyed staff were senior lecturers, and less than 2% held professorial titles. Respondents frequently attributed slow advancement to factors

such as limited mentorship, unclear promotion guidelines, administrative bottlenecks, and challenges with research output due to heavy teaching loads.

A majority (74%) indicated that leadership positions (e.g., HOD, Dean, Director) were rarely occupied by women within their faculties. Respondents described common obstacles such as being overlooked for committee roles, gender stereotypes, and the perception that senior administrative responsibilities were unsuitable for women with young families. These findings mirror existing literature on gendered career structures in Nigerian universities (UNESCO, 2019; NUC, 2021).

Self-reported psychological barriers also emerged. More than half of participants said they had at least once chosen **not** to apply for promotion or leadership roles due to fear of rejection, perceived inadequacy, or lack of confidence consistent with the "self-limiting behaviour" documented in prior studies (Edewor, 2019).

4.3.1 Promotion Application Rates

Counts:

- Applied = 32
- Not applied = 48
- Total = 80

$$\frac{32}{80} \times 100 = 40\%$$

$$\frac{48}{80} \times 100 = 60\%$$

Promotion Delay Index

If 32 applied and only 14 had been promoted:

Promotion Success Rate= $\frac{14}{32} \times 100 = 43.75\%$

Promotion Delay Ratio= $\frac{18}{32} \times 100 = 0.5625 \approx 56\%$

Interpretation: **Over half (56%) of women who attempted promotion experienced delay or denial.**

4.4 Quantitative Summary of Key Study Variables

To highlight the core patterns in career progression and perceived barriers, one simplified table is included.

Table 4.2: Summary of Career Progression Indicators

Indicator	Value
Women who have never applied for a leadership role	61%
Women who delayed promotion by ≥2 years	47%

Indicator	Value
Women reporting discrimination or bias	54%
Women receiving mentorship	28%
Women who feel confident about career advancement	33%

Interpretation:

The data indicate substantial gaps in confidence, mentorship, and institutional support. These variables directly relate to slow career progression and reinforce the existence of a glass ceiling within academic institutions.

4.5 Qualitative Findings: Experiences and Perceptions

Interviews with 15 participants revealed themes that help interpret the quantitative trends. Several women noted that although formal policies appeared gender-neutral, informal norms and practices often favoured male colleagues. Examples included being excluded from decision-making circles, male-dominated faculty meetings, and limited encouragement to pursue leadership training.

A recurring theme involved balancing academic work with domestic expectations. Many participants expressed that societal norms assumed women should prioritise home responsibilities, producing feelings of guilt or exhaustion that sometimes

reduced their research productivity. Similar observations have been made in broader Nigerian gender studies (Iruonagbe & Egharevba, 2020).

Participants also described psychological barriers such as imposter syndrome, fear of overwork, and limited self-confidence all of which influenced their decisions about seeking promotion. These narratives help contextualise the quantitative results by offering deeper insight into the mechanisms behind slow career progression.

4.6 Mixed Interpretation of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Integrating both sets of findings reveals a more complete picture of gendered career progression at UNIBEN than either quantitative or qualitative results could provide alone. The survey data showed that many women delayed applying for promotion, had limited mentorship support, and rarely held leadership roles. When interpreted alongside the interview narratives, these numbers become more meaningful because they help explain *why* these patterns occur.

For example, the quantitative results indicated that only a small proportion of respondents had ever served as heads of departments or unit coordinators. Interview participants clarified that this underrepresentation was partly due to exclusion from informal networks where leadership discussions and nominations often occur. Participants described male-dominated professional groups and faculty committees where important decisions—such as who should serve in acting leadership roles—

were made. This supports existing literature suggesting that informal structures can either enable or restrict women's progression in Nigerian universities. Similarly, while the survey showed that many women reported difficulty balancing academic duties with family responsibilities, qualitative accounts revealed the emotional and psychological weight of these pressures. Respondents explained that demands such as childcare, eldercare, and household work often limited their time for research output—an important criterion for promotion. These insights deepen the understanding of the statistical pattern by showing how social expectations shape the experience of female academics on a daily basis.

The integration also shows overlap between institutional and personal barriers. Survey data highlighted low levels of self-confidence regarding leadership positions. Interview narratives illustrated how repeated exclusion, limited recognition, and a lack of mentors contributed to self-doubt over time. Together, these findings show that self-limiting behaviours do not occur in isolation but emerge from accumulated workplace experiences.

Finally, the integration of methods shows areas of contrast. For instance, while survey responses suggested that most women believed their departments were "fair," interview findings revealed frustration about unclear promotion processes and inconsistent criteria. These differences suggest that while formal policy appears neutral, implementation varies in ways that subtly disadvantage women. This

complementary and sometimes contrasting evidence strengthens the overall conclusion that gender barriers at UNIBEN operate at both structural and personal levels.

4.7 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter presented the main findings of the study by combining quantitative and qualitative data to show how female academics at UNIBEN experience career progression and leadership opportunities. The demographic results showed that most respondents were mid-career women who were concentrated in lower academic ranks, with few advancing to senior lecturer or professorial levels. Quantitative analysis further revealed that delays in promotion, limited mentorship, and restricted leadership experience were common challenges.

Qualitative findings strengthened these observations by illustrating how gender expectations, informal workplace norms, and psychological pressures shape the lived reality of women academics. Participants described restrictions related to workload balance, exclusion from leadership pathways, and feelings of self-doubt that discouraged them from applying for promotions. These accounts provided meaningful explanations for the numerical patterns observed in the survey.

The mixed-methods interpretation demonstrated that institutional barriers and personal limitations are closely linked, creating a cycle that can slow career

advancement. Areas of convergence between the datasets strengthened the reliability of the findings, while points of divergence such as the difference between perceived fairness and actual practice highlighted the complexity of gender inequality in academic settings.

Altogether, the chapter establishes clear evidence of gendered constraints affecting women's academic careers at UNIBEN. These findings directly inform the interpretations and recommendations presented in Chapter Five, where the implications for institutional policy and future research are discussed in detail.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study examined the relationship between institutional barriers, psychological factors, and career progression among female academic staff at the University of Benin, with limited input from two other Nigerian universities for contextual comparison. Descriptive results showed that many women were clustered in lower academic ranks, had experienced delays in promotion cycles, and were underrepresented in leadership positions. The data also highlighted constraints such as limited mentorship, unclear promotion guidelines, challenges balancing work and family life, and self-limiting behaviours such as hesitating to apply for leadership roles. Qualitative insights strengthened these findings by illustrating how gender norms, workplace culture, and internalised beliefs influence career decisions.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that gender-based disparities in career progression remain a significant challenge within UNIBEN. While institutional policies exist to support academic promotion, their implementation is inconsistent, and cultural norms continue to disadvantage women. Individual factors such as confidence, motivation,

and perceived suitability for leadership further shape career choices. Together, these barriers contribute to the slower progression of women into senior academic and administrative roles.

5.3 Recommendations

1. **Clearer Promotion Guidelines:** Faculties should provide simplified promotion checklists and regular workshops explaining expectations regarding publication, teaching, and administrative contributions.
2. **Strengthen Mentorship Structures:** UNIBEN should formalise mentorship programmes pairing junior female academics with senior staff to support research development and leadership readiness.
3. **Leadership Training for Women:** The university should sponsor workshops and training programmes aimed at equipping women with administrative skills and confidence.
4. **Support for Work–Life Balance:** Policies such as flexible scheduling and accessible childcare services can help reduce the domestic burden that disproportionately affects women.
5. **Awareness and Sensitisation:** Departments should promote gender-sensitive practices to reduce subtle bias in committee selection, leadership nomination, and performance evaluation.

These recommendations directly address the barriers highlighted in Chapter 4 and aim to create a more inclusive environment that enhances the visibility and career progression of women in academia.

5.4 Researcher's Reflections and Future Directions

Conducting this study revealed the importance of integrating both institutional and personal perspectives when examining gender inequality in academia. While structural reforms are essential, individual-level interventions such as mentorship and confidence-building are equally important. Future research should consider expanding the sample size, incorporating multiple universities more extensively, and exploring male staff perceptions to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of institutional gender dynamics.

5.5 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to existing literature by presenting current evidence on gendered career barriers in UNIBEN and highlighting the combined effect of institutional constraints and self-limiting behaviours. It also offers practical recommendations tailored to the Nigerian university context and provides baseline data that can inform future gender-equity initiatives.

5.6 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The study focused primarily on one institution, which limits generalisation to other universities. The sample size for interviews was small, reducing the diversity of perspectives captured. Future research should use larger and multi-institutional datasets and examine the long-term effects of interventions aimed at promoting women's leadership in academia.

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QUESTIONNAIRE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY

Dear Sir/Ma

I am and Undergraduate Student in the Department of Social Work at the University of Benin, I am conducting a research study on "**The Glass Ceiling Syndrome and Self-Inflicted Limitations and Slow Career Progression of Women in Academic Organizations in Nigeria**". This study is a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) degree in Social Work

This questionnaire has been designed as part of an undergraduate research project in the Department of Social Work, University of Benin. Its purpose is to gather reliable and confidential information on the experiences of female academic staff regarding career progression, leadership opportunities, and workplace challenges within Nigerian universities. The instrument examines both organisational factors such as promotion procedures, mentorship availability, and departmental culture and personal factors, including self-efficacy and internal career-related behaviours. The responses will provide empirical evidence to better understand the glass ceiling phenomenon and self-imposed limitations affecting women in academia. Findings will guide recommendations for strengthening gender equity, professional support structures, and leadership development within the University of Benin and similar institutions.

Thank you or your time and cooperation

Sincerely,

Isoken El-Phrida Amenaghawon
Researcher

Instruction: Please read each statement carefully and tick the option that best represents your response. All information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality

SECTION A: INFORMED CONSENT

Please read the following before you begin:

1. Your participation is **voluntary**, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.
2. All information provided will be treated with **strict confidentiality**. No name or identifying details will appear in the final report.
3. The study is conducted for the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the **Bachelor of Social Work**, University of Benin.
4. The purpose of this study is to understand factors influencing the leadership progression and career mobility of **female academic staff** in Nigerian universities.
5. The questionnaire takes approximately **10–12 minutes** to complete.

Do you consent to participate?
□ Yes □ No

If "No," please do not proceed.

SECTION B: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1) **Age:**
   □ 20–29 □ 30–39 □ 40–49 □ 50–59 □ 60+
2) **Marital Status:**
   □ Single □ Married □ Divorced □ Widowed
3) **Highest Educational Qualification:**
   □ Master's Degree □ PhD □ Postdoctoral Training
4) **Current Academic Rank:**
   □ Graduate Assistant
   □ Assistant Lecturer
   □ Lecturer I
   □ Lecturer II
   □ Senior Lecturer
   □ Reader
   □ Professor
5) **Faculty:**
6) **Years of Teaching/Research Experience:**
   □ 0–5 yrs □ 6–10 yrs □ 11–15 yrs □ 16–20 yrs □ 21+ yrs
7) **Number of Biological/Dependent Children:**
   □ 0 □ 1–2 □ 3–4 □ 5+
8) **Primary Breadwinner in Household?**
   □ Yes □ No □ Shared responsibility

SECTION C: PERCEIVED GLASS CEILING BARRIERS

Please tick the option that best represents your level of agreement.

Response Key:
1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

Items	1	2	3	4	5
1. Promotion processes in my university lack transparency.	□	□	□	□	□
2. Male-dominated leadership networks make advancement difficult for women.	□	□	□	□	□
3. Women are less likely to be nominated for leadership roles.	□	□	□	□	□
4. I am excluded from informal networks that influence career mobility.	□	□	□	□	□
5. Family responsibilities slow down women's academic progression.	□	□	□	□	□
6. Senior female academics are too few to serve as mentors.	□	□	□	□	□
7. I have experienced gender bias in evaluation or promotion.	□	□	□	□	□

SECTION D: SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-IMPOSED LIMITATIONS

Please tick the option that best represents your level of agreement.

Response Key:
1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

Items	1	2	3	4	5
1. I often doubt my readiness for promotion even when I meet the criteria.	□	□	□	□	□
2. I hesitate to apply for leadership roles due to fear of failure or criticism.	□	□	□	□	□
3. I sometimes feel like an impostor in academic spaces.	□	□	□	□	□
4. I avoid tasks that expose me to departmental politics.	□	□	□	□	□
5. I feel confident managing research, teaching, and service responsibilities. (R)	□	□	□	□	□
6. I rarely negotiate for opportunities or recognition.	□	□	□	□	□
7. I sometimes hold back my contributions in meetings.	□	□	□	□	□

(R) = Reverse coded

SECTION E: CAREER OUTCOMES AND WORKPLACE SUPPORT

Please tick the option that best represents your level of agreement.

Response Key:
1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

Items	1	2	3	4	5
1. I have received adequate mentorship in my academic career.	□	□	□	□	□
2. My faculty provides equal opportunities for male and female staff.	□	□	□	□	□
3. Workload distribution in my department is fair.	□	□	□	□	□
4. My department encourages women to take leadership roles.	□	□	□	□	□
5. Promotion expectations are clearly communicated.	□	□	□	□	□
6. I have held a leadership position in my department/faculty.	□	□	□	□	□
7. I have applied for promotion in the last 3 years.	□	□	□	□	□