EXPLORING THE PROGRESSION OF WOMEN IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS AT AN OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING INSTITUTION IN GAUTENG

by

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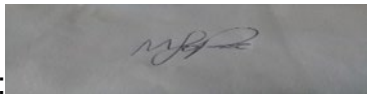**CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr Tebogo Molotsi**
FEBRUARY 2024

DECLARATION

I, Mantsha Madiroko Mfopa (Student Number: 30782473) declare that the study entitled: **EXPLORING THE PROGRESSION OF WOMEN IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS AT AN OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING INSTITUTION IN GAUTENG** is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted originality requirements. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa or any other higher education institution for another qualification.

Signature:

Date: 27 February 2024

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ABSTRACT

Women's progression and participation in senior management power structures is very limited in higher education institutions. Moreover, the prevalence of progressive laws that seek to promote women progression in South Africa is not an adequate reflection of the efforts that still need to be undertaken in this regard. The purpose of this study is to explore the progression of women to senior management positions at an open distance electronic learning (ODeL) institution in Gauteng Province in order to highlight the inherent power structures and institutional dynamics that limit the progression of women as well as suggest measures which can be put in place to enhance the progression of women to senior management positions.

This qualitative study adopted the interpretative phenomenological analysis research design approach for obtaining relevant information from the lived experiences of the participants. Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews held with a sample size of 25 purposively sampled participants who fulfilled the researcher's pre-determined selection criteria. Thematic data analysis was utilised to process and categorise the verbatim interview-based information elicited from the participants. The findings of the study revealed the fundamental need for implementing laws, employment equity policies and human resource recruitment processes that promote the progression of women to senior-level management positions.

Keywords: feminism, open distance e-learning institution, patriarchy, power structures, women progression, senior management.

KAKARETŠO

Kakaretšo ya basadi le go kgatha tema ka dibopegong tša taolo maemong a godimo go mo maemong a fase kudu ka gare ga ditheo tša thuto ya godimo. Go feta fao, go ata ga melao ya kakaretšo yeo e nyakago go matlafatša kakaretšo ya basadi ka Afrika Borwa ga e fe seswantšho se se lekanego sa maitapišo ao a sa ntšego a swanetše go dirwa mabapi le maemo a. Maikemišetšo a nyakišišo ye ke go nyakišiša kakaretšo ya basadi mešomong ya taolo maemong a godimo ka setheong sa thuto ya inthanete ya bokgole bjo bo bulegilego (ODeL) ka Profenseng ya Gauteng go tšweletša dibopego tša taolo tša tlhago le diphetogo tša setheo tšeo di laolago kakaretšo ya basadi gammogo le go šišinya magato ao a ka bewago go matlafatša kakaretšo ya basadi ka gare ga maemo a taolo maemong a godimo.

Nyakišišo ye ya khwalithethifi e amogetše mokgwa wa tlhathollo ya tshekatsheko ya tiragalo ya nyakišišo ya tlhamo ya go hwetša tshedimošo ya maleba go tšwa maitemogelong a batšwasehlabelo. Datha e kgobokeditšwe ka dipoledišano tša motho ka o tee ka o tee tšeo di sa rulaganywago ka botlalo tšeo di swerwego ka sampole ya batšwasehlabelo ya bogolo bja 25 bao ba tšerwego sampole ka nepo bao ba kgotsofaditšego dikritheria tša kgetho tša monyakišiši tšeo di laeditšwego pele. Tshekatsheko ya datha ya thematiki e šomišitšwe go prosesa le go hlopha tshedimošo ye e theilwego godimo ga poledišano ya ntšu ka ntšu (verbatim) yeo e hweditšwego go tšwa go batšwasehlabelo. Dikutullo tša nyakišišo ye di utollotše tlhokego ya motheo ya go tsenya tirišong melao, melawana ya tekatekano ya mešomo le ditshepedišo tša go thwala methopo ya bašomi tšeo di tšwetšago pele kakaretšo ya basadi gore ba akaretšwe ka maemong a taolo a maemo a godimo.

Mantšu a bohlokwa: bofeminisi, setheo sa thuto ya inthanete sa bokgole bjo bo bulegilego, bopatriareka, dibopego tša taolo, kakaretšo ya basadi, taolo maemong a godimo.

OKUCASHUNIWE

Isencane kakhulu inqubekela phambili kanye nokubamba iqhaza kwabesifazane ekuphatheni izikhundla ezinhlakeni eziphezulu ezikhungweni zemfundo ephakeme. Ngaphezu kwalokho, ukusabalala kwemithetho ebhekele inqubekela phambili eyakhelwe ukukhuthaza inqubekela phambili yabesifazane eNingizimu Afrika akuzibonisi ngokwanele izinto okusadingeka ukuba zenziwe mayelana nalokhu. Inhloso yalolu cwaningo ukuhlola inqubekela phambili yabantu besifazane ekuphatheni ezikhundleni eziphezulu esikhungweni sokufunda nanoma ukuphi (ODeL) eSifundazweni sase-Gauteng ukuze kugqanyiswe amandla adalwa yilokhu kanye nokuguquka kwesikhungo okunqunda inqubekela phambili kwabesifazane kanjalo nokuphakamisa izindlela ezingasetshenziswa ukuze kube nenqubekela phambili kwabesifazane ekuphatheni ezikhundleni eziphezulu.

Lolu cwaningo lwenziwe ngokusebenzisa indlela yokuhlaziya iqophelo kusetshenziswa isimo esingajwayelekile ukuze kutholakale ulwazi olufanele kubabambiqhaza asebeke babhekana nesimo okukhulunywa ngaso. Idatha iqoqwa ngokwenza uhlelo oluqale lwahlelwa ngaphambi kokuqaliswa ukuze kuxoxiswane nomuntu ngamunye kubabambiqhaza abangama-25 nabakwazile ukufezekisa isifiso somcwaningi. Lapha kusetshenziswe indlela yokuhlaziywa kwezihlokwana ukuze kucutshungulwe futhi kuhlelwe uhlelo lokuthola ulwazi ngezinkulumongxoxo nababambiqhaza. Imiphumela yalolu cwaningo iveze ukuthi kunesidingo esibalulekile sokuqaliswa kokusebenza kwemithetho, izinqubomgomo zokuqashwa ngokulingana kanye nezindlela zokuqasha abasebenzi ngokubhekelela inqubekela phambili yabantu besifazane ekuphatheni ezikhundleni eziphezulu.

Amagama amqoka: okwabesifazana, isikhungo sokufunda nanoma ukuphi, inzalabantu, izakhiwo zezokuphatha/zezamandla, inqubekela phambili yabesifazane, abaphathi abaphezulu.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEO   Chief Executive Officer

CGE   Commission on Gender Equality

DHET   Department of Higher Education and Training

DoL   Department of Labour

DREC   Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics Innovation Committee

EEA   Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998

ERC   Ethics Review Committee

GEPS   Gender Equality Plans

HEI   Higher Education Institution

HESA   Higher Education South Africa

HRC   Human Rights Commission

HRIS   Human Resource Information Systems

IPA   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

ODeL   Open Distance Electronic Learning

POPIA   Protection of Personal Information Act

RPSC   Research Permission Sub-Committee

SADC   Southern African Development Community

SDA   Skills Development Act

SDGs   Sustainable Development Goals

SRIPCC   Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees, and Commercialisation Committee

UK   United Kingdom

UN   United Nations

UNESCO United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNISA   University of South Africa

USA   United States of America

USAf   Universities South Africa

VC   Vice Chancellor

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CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The need for research and a focus on the continuing scarcity of women in leadership positions across various societal domains, despite constituting the majority of the population in many countries, is still pertinent and relevant (Surawicz 2016; Monnapula-Mapesela 2017; Gallagher & Morison 2019; Shinbrot et al. 2019). The society's patriarchal structure continues to reinforce male dominance in leadership , with slight variations evident in South African public universities' executive positions. Despite significant promotion of diversity in companies as well as legislation for equal opportunities for women and men, women still remain predominantly underrepresented in in decision-making positions. This observation reflects the glass ceiling phenomenon and the inherent power structures that constitute vertical discrimination within higher education institutions against women. Although the glass ceiling has attracted research attention, some authors have pointed out that theoretical models have made little attempt to develop an understanding of this phenomenon and its implications. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and better understand the phenomenon of the glass ceiling by considering both its causes, how it hinders the progression of women to senior management positions and its possible consequences.

The predominant patriarchal system in most societal structures throughout the world has resulted in the normalisation of gender imbalances and unequal power relations between men and women, or males and females (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). In that regard, South Africa has not been exempted from the phenomenon of gender imbalances (inequality and inequity), according to which women in most employment organisations continue to encounter unequal opportunities and discrimination in comparison to their male colleagues (Matiwane, 2019). The entrepreneurship environment is not immune from these gender-related challenges, which have rendered women lacking decision-making and leadership experience in the public sphere because, unlike their male counterparts, they have been socialised into assuming passive roles outside the family context (Seale et al., 2021).

In countries such as the United States of America (USA), African American women have been fighting for socio-economic equality and justice since the 1960s (Catalyst, 2020).

However, the fight for equality appears to be on-going in the present as they are underrepresented and continue to face barriers that prevent them from progressing to senior management positions (Frye, 2019). In 2019, the African American women's participation rate in the labour force was 60.5%, compared to that of their Caucasian counterparts at 56.8% (Roux, 2021). However, the participation rate for African American women in the labour force was in decline at 58.8% in comparison with the 56.2% of all women in the workplace in 2020 (Roux, 2021).

Despite these participation rates, African American women only represent 1.4% of the executive leadership positions (Lean, 2020). The general problem is that African American women do not have the same opportunities as women of other races. On the other hand, women in senior management positions occupy less than 25% of senior management positions at colleges and universities in the United Kingdom (UK) (Vinnicombe & Mavin, 2023).

In traditional societies, females typically remain within the family and home. Individuals, such as parents, educators, or siblings, instruct and accept decisions made on their behalf (Moodly, 2021). As such, there is a definite need to unmask and deconstruct all masculine mechanisms of power which still pose obstacles in the progression of women to senior management positions in all private and public organisational spheres (Sulkowski & Marjanski, 2019).

In this study, the researcher explored the progression of women to senior management positions at an open distance e-learning (ODeL) higher education institution in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Senior management positions are the highest responsibility roles which duly qualified and/ or competent individuals hold within a unit or division of an organisation (Ramohai, 2019). It is imperative for senior management to ensure that individuals are competent to perform their designated tasks and comprehend the safety implications of their actions. It is incumbent for senior managers to acquire the necessary education and training, as well as the skills, knowledge, and experience in order to guarantee their competence (Adeniji et al., 2019). Training shall ensure that individuals are aware of the relevance and significance of their activities and how their activities contribute to progression of the policies, vision, mission and strategic objectives of their organisations goals (Ramohai, 2019).

Collectively, the chapter presents an overview of the study by describing the background and motivation of the study; the problem statement; the research purpose, objectives, and questions; the definition of key concepts; an overview of the applied research methodology; the significance of the study; as well as an outline of the remaining chapters in the entire study.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Since 2015, the international community has moved towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) declared by the United Nations (UN). In particular, SDG-5 aims at investing gender equality across all sectors by 2030. Consistent with this goal, gender issues for women and female leaders have attracted much attention in recent years (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). Women in leadership play an essential role in gender equality by bringing unique perspectives and experiences to management and leadership positions, leading to better decision-making and innovation (Wu et al., 2022). Such evolving leadership roles are which critical for positive work environments (Wu et al., 2022).

However, women encounter significant challenges that militate against their progress to senior management positions, including bias, and lack of and opportunities (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). The issue of few women in senior management positions has been explored in several gender equity studies all over the world and in South Africa as well (Chanana, 2020; Moodly & Toni, 2019a). This gender-based numerical discrepancy is attributed to various factors and constraints, which include, but not limited to the glass ceiling, gendered power dynamics, misconceptions about women capabilities, and work-home life balance (Herbst, 2020). It is in this regard that it was deemed necessary to conduct research for the purpose of establishing the causal factors of women not progressing to senior management positions in higher education institutions. Generally, these positions are currently occupied by their male counterparts (Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020).

The prejudice meted against women's progression is occurring even though several nations, including South Africa, have legislative frameworks and policies that regulate and promote gender parity in the labour practices of higher education institutions (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Toni & Moodly, 2019). Despite the prevalence of gender equity regulations,

few women have progressed to senior management positions in South African higher education institutions (Bosch et al., 2019). Affirmative action policies in the South African education system appear to have minimal, or no effect on the representation and progression of women to senior management positions as few women are appointed to leadership positions.

Whilst developed countries are successively making progress towards gender equality, most developing countries, including South Africa, still lag behind (United Nations, 2019). Similar to general world-wide trends, leadership positions in South Africa have from time immemorial been reserved for men due to factors such as the patriarchal structure of the society, as well as racial, gender, and socio-cultural stereotype and perspectives held by men in leadership (Toni & Moodly, 2019).

Various legislative and policy prescripts have been initiated to address the gender bias anomalies which have side-lined women for generations. These included the Education White Paper 3 (Republic of South Africa, 1996); the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998), the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001) and the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill (Republic of South Africa, 2013). However, the gender imbalances at senior management level in higher education institutions has not been fully addressed through the introduction of these policies and regulations (Toni & Moodly, 2019). For instance, less than three of every 100 universities in Africa are led by women vice-chancellors (Waruru, 2023).

Although the number of women entering the workforce has increased consistently, only a small fraction is in senior management positions in South Africa (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020). This scenario provides manifestations of a more pervasive underlying condition in which men are regarded as more valuable and worthy than women. As such, South African higher education institutions have gradually implemented programmes to empower women in response to the government's call to empower women (Bangani, & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020). However, inconsistency between such programmes and their actual implementation is evident in the persistence of institutional gender inequality.

Previous studies have explored challenges that are encountered by women in their pursuit for management positions. In that context, Lekchiri et al. (2019) conducted

research at a Moroccan institution of higher education and identified the following gender bias behaviours: abusive, verbal, physical, or sexual harassment; discriminatory treatment; termination; and a lack of trust, recognition, and acknowledgement. On the other hand, Khalid and Sekiguchi (2019) and Tabassum et al. (2019) reflected factors such as the glass ceiling, gender discrimination, organisational culture, work-family conflict, the old boys' network, stereotyping, insufficient support, and personal characteristics as constituting some of the most prevalent barriers to the progression of women.

Similarly, studies conducted by Devicienti et al. (2019), Hentschel et al. (2019), and Manzi and Heilman (2021) at the beginning of the 21st century confirmed that women are yet to be perceived as relevant within structures of power and leadership in academia. In this regard, it has been established by Bangani and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2020) and Toni and Moodly (2019), that there are several factors obstructing women's progression to top management positions, such as organisational and cultural factors, and attitudinal and organisational biases against women.

Therefore, factors that hinder women from progressing within higher education are well known, and mostly exist in the recruitment and promotion processes which do not consider gender equality issues (Aiston & Fo, 2021). These stereotyped recruitment processes appear to be biased towards men rather than women and hinder the progression of women to senior management positions based on prevalent patriarchal or male dominated constructs and tendencies (Brabazon & Schulz, 2020; Moodly, 2021).

1.3 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY

The motivation of this study is essentially located in the reasons, rationale, and justification for undertaking this study (Baron & McNeal, 2019). The researcher is an employee at an ODeL institution in Gauteng Province and has observed and experienced the on-going manifestation of gender inequality in all organisational levels. The researcher's primary motivation for doing this study was the growing dissatisfaction with women's lived experiences related to the ODeL institution's disregard for their professional growth. Throughout the recruitment process, decision makers such as human resource recruitment process, together with the domineering male representatives from organised labour, have impeded women with postgraduate degrees, such as

Honours, Masters and PhDs as well as a substantial amount of years of work experience, from consideration for progression to higher managerial positions. The study, which examines the lack of progression of women to senior management positions, was inspired by the author's personal experience of being hindered by male and occasionally even female representatives from organised labour and the management representatives of the ODeL institution, the researcher was so impacted that women seeking to progress to senior level management roles were even barred from doing so through the use of talent management, a career development procedure.

A plethora of previous research studies have shown that women's progression and participation in higher education institutional senior management power structures remain limited, which is different from their male counterparts' experiences (The Hidden Truth Report, 2022). Furthermore, the barriers to women's progression in institutions of higher education have received more attention, whereas women in open distance e-learning landscapes have received less of such attention. In that context, the current study seeks to enhance understanding regarding the obstacles that prevent women from advancing to senior management positions, particularly in ODeL higher education institutions.

To achieve the above-cited goal, the study explores the experiences of women in an ODeL higher education institution in South Africa to understand the obstacles or impediments they endure in their pursuit of senior management positions. There is a pervasive perception that the rate at which women progress across management levels in organisations varies from the experience of their male counterparts (Fitong-Ketchiwou et al., 2022). Therefore, it is imperative to know and understand the challenges faced by women in their constant struggles and endeavours to successfully progress and remain in senior management and leadership roles (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Central to the study is the issue of gender imbalances (i.e., inequalities and inequities). In particular, the problem of the study is situated in the challenges and barriers that inhibit the progression of women to senior management positions in higher education institutions (HEIs) specifically, and other organisational contexts in general. There is noticeable rise in discontent among women regarding their lived experiences within ODeL institution, particularly concerning the disregard for their professional growth. Throughout the recruitment process, decision makers such as human resource recruitment process, often

influenced by assertive male representatives from organised labour, have impeded women with postgraduate degrees, ranging from Honoursto PhDs andsubstantial work experience from being considered for higher managerial positions. On a personal level, the researcher was profoundly affected by witnessing women being systematically barred from advancing to senior management roles, even through talent management and career development procedures.

In the South African context, the sparseness of women's progression or progression to senior management and executive positions is evident (Shinbrot et al., 2019). As such, the apparent gender divide has become a source of serious concern for gender equity and gender studies. The problem of the study further extends to the policy and legislative realms. In this regard, the prevalence of policies and other regulatory mechanisms seem to lack an implementation effect since gender diversity and equity in HEIs persists, with women remaining underrepresented in senior management positions (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Kapareliotis & Miliopoulou, 2019; Toni & Moodly, 2019).

The progression or progression of women to senior management positions in South African universities and other organisational contexts is sparse. Consequently, they are overrepresented at the job entry level but underrepresented in senior management positions (Ramohai, 2019; Storey, 2019). According to Heathfield (2019) and Vasel (2019), the progression or progression of women is both an expression and recognition of their rights to be promoted and encouraged to rise in leadership and management positions in order to earn a higher salary, while also displaying their organisational capabilities to cope with increased work responsibilities and authority.

Furthermore, career progression is viewed as recognition of personal achievement and contribution, balance, promotions, rewards, successes, and impact at the workplace (Fida et al., 2021). Progression opportunities serve as motivation for people to work harder and become more successful and productive at work. Adeniji et al. (2019) have observed that the extent of career progression is a major barrier to achieving high efficiency and organisational success. Accordingly, the issue of women's organisational progression constitutes a core tenet of the problem of this study. It is in that regard that the study was concerned with the factors that impede the progression of women to senior management positions. Therefore, it could be stated that 'the glass ceiling syndrome' has become a

pivotal factor in women's struggles concerning their progression to higher management and leadership positions in any organisational context.

The notion of the glass ceiling is reflective of the invisible barrier within an organisation or industry that precludes or marginalises certain individuals from being promoted to managerial and executive-level positions (Abbas et al., 2021). The phrase is commonly used to describe the challenges women and minorities encounter when attempting to advance in male-dominated corporate hierarchies. Specific to the current study, the glass ceiling relates to the vertical segregation of women in both private and public organisations, which is a barrier to women's progression to top positions in organisations (Abbas et al., 2021).

According to Manzi and Heilman (2021), the glass ceiling is not necessarily a revolution, but depicts a series of incremental changes aimed at the covert discriminatory and oppressive forces that still exist within organisations. As such, the glass ceiling is a disguised perpetuation of the problem, rather than an instrument for advancing women's career progression in any employment organisation.

The knowledge gap addressed in this study is the absence of research on the progression of women to senior management roles within the current setting. Consequently, the persistence of issues related to gender equality and the progression of women remains largely unaddressed.

1.5 RESEARCH PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, AND QUESTIONS

This section provides an outline of the purpose, objectives, pertinent questions of the study.

1.5.1 Purpose of the Study

The research purpose is reflective of the declarative statement about the researcher's general or overarching intentions and reasons for undertaking the study (Kate & Whitley, 2018). Additionally, it is on the basis of the research aim that the articulation of the research objectives and questions is adequately advanced (Kate & Whitley, 2018). In that regard, the purpose of this study is to explore the progression of women to senior management positions within an ODeL institution in Gauteng Province. By doing so, it seeks to highlight on the entrenched power dynamics and institutional mechanisms that

hinder women's progression. Additionally, the study aims to propose actionable measures to promote the progression of women to senior management positions.

1.5.2 Research Objectives

Research objectives are essentially the specific actions, processes, and activities undertaken to bring the research aim into practical reality (Kate & Whitley, 2018). Therefore, the objectives of the current study are stated as follows:

- To explore the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that impede the progression of women to senior management and leadership roles;
- To determine the ODeL institution's extent of compliance with the implementation of policies and laws that seek to promote the progression of women to senior management positions within the organisation;
- To explore perceptions concerning the glass ceiling that hinders women from progressing to senior positions in higher education management; and
- To explore measures needed to enhance women's' chances of progressing to senior management positions at the ODeL institutions of higher learning.

1.5.3 Research Questions

The research questions are the interrogative version of the research questions, and also shape the nature of the research instruments preferred by the researcher in the study (Chauvet, 2020; Kate & Whitley, 2018). The research questions are demarcated into the primary and secondary questions. Accordingly, the primary research question (which links directly with the research aim) of the study is:

- What is the state of the progression of women to senior management and leadership positions at an ODeL institution in Gauteng Province?

The secondary questions (which link directly with the research objectives) are formulated as follows:

- Which are the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that impede the progression of women to senior management positions?
- What is the ODeL institution's extent of compliance with implementation of policies and laws that seek to promote the progression of women to senior management positions?
- What are the perceptions concerning the glass ceiling that hinders women from progressing to senior positions in higher education management?

- What measures are needed to enhance women's' chances of progressing to senior management positions at the ODeL institutions of higher learning?

1.6 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The definition of the below-stated key concepts used is a mechanism to prevent any confusion or ambiguity regarding their disciplinary, methodological, or practice-related application in various contexts throughout the study (Cizek, 2020; Flick, 2020). For instance, there is a tendency to use the terms "gender equality" and "gender equity" as synonymous. Therefore, defining these terms is helpful insofar as providing clarity and meaning in their various application or usage.

1.6.1 Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998)

The Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) is a law that ensures equal opportunities and equitable treatment for all employees from their employers, particularly in post-apartheid South Africa (Matoka & Odeku, 2021). The Act also advocates for particular emphasis to be placed on the affirmative action policy by enhancing equal opportunity while addressing historical imbalances induced by apartheid. However, there are concerns that affirmative action could pose a difficulty because it is couched in discriminatory language. Furthermore, if managed haphasardly, affirmative action may undermine merit and result in the exclusion of deserving individuals (Matoka & Odeku, 2021). Another concern is that it could be used by the political elite as a cover for corruption and nepotism, to the detriment of the poorest of the impoverished among designated groups.

1.6.2 Gender Equality

Gender equality is defined by various authors as the condition wherein individuals, have equal access to resources and opportunities, irrespective of their gender (Espi et al., 2019). Gender equality encompasses the fair and equal participation of individuals in economic activities, the ability to make decisions without any bias based on gender, and the acknowledgment and acceptance of a wide range of behaviours, aspirations, and needs without discrimination.

1.6.3 Gender Equity

Gender equity is characterised as the ongoing endeavour to ensure fairness amongst individuals of both genders, that is, the equitable treatment of men and women (Mwagiru, 2019). Since equity leads to equality, women's rights and empowerment imply that men and women possess equal status and opportunities to fully exercise their human rights. Furthermore, they can contribute to all aspects of national political, cultural, and socio-economic progress and receive appropriate recognition for their endeavours (Seale et al., 2021).

1.6.4 Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) Institution

ODeL institution is a post-matric place and system of online or technology-assisted and asynchronous teaching and learning without any hinderances of distance, cost, and time to pursue their education online (Maboe, 2019; Molotsi, 2021). Such institutions allow entry to local and international students from various sectors and backgrounds to pursue their educational interests and needs according to their selected tailored curriculum programmes. ODeL students should be technologically literate in order to understand the academic, administrative, and technical support services available at their institutions.

1.6.5 Power Structure

The term, 'power structure' relates to a hierarchical organisation according to which patterns of authority, competence, and intra-organisational or extra-organisational relationships and influence are structured (Giangravé, 2021). Structured power relations if formal organisations and institutions such as the military, the church, the government, society, and business. Furthermore, a power structure could manifest in the form of an informal set of roles, such as those in a dominance hierarchy, in which members of a social group interact aggressively to establish their own defined ranking system (Giangravé, 2021). This study examines the power dynamics within ODeL institutions.

1.6.6 Career progression

Career progression is a form of upward career mobility within and between organisations (Weng & Zhu, 2020). This concept entails an upward movement through promotion from one level to another. Management career progression is conceived of as promotions in managerial ranks and attainment of high managerial levels and pay. Similarly, career progression is referred to as the upward movement of job level, position and title in

organisational hierarchy as well as increasing in earnings or income (Thurasamy et al, 2011). An employee is considered to have a fair and equal opportunity to be promoted to a higher level or to move to another functional area in an organisation to gain experience or development purpose.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE APPLIED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is presented in more details in Chapter 3. This study has adopted the constructivist-interpretive philosophical paradigm (worldview or perspective) largely as a result of the qualitative research approach that the researcher has applied to fulfil the overall purpose of the study. Furthermore, the research study has adopted the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) design to guide its preferred research methodology. The IPA research design focuses primarily on the lived experiences of individuals and the sense they make of these experiences within the confines of their ecological or social environment according to their own perspectives (Gyollai, 2020; Smith & Nizza, 2022). In addition, the IPA is advantageous for its allowance of the researcher's assumption of both an insider's and an outsider's stance in relation to the phenomenon being studied (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021).

Based on its focus on the progression or progression of women in management and leadership roles, the population of the study then comprised fundamentally of females or women who were involved in and aspired to advance within the ODeL institution, in Gauteng Province. These women were chosen from several management tiers, including senior and middle management, as well as operational or supervisory roles.

For data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 purposively sampled women in middle-management positions at the ODeL institution Gauteng Province. Thematic data analysis was applied in accordance with the IPA research design for the purpose of processing and translating the participants' verbatim interview statements or responses into meaningful data and findings of the study (Smith, 2019; Smith & Eatough, 2019).

The scientific rigour and trustworthiness of the study findings were ensured by means of the adoption of four criteria, namely; credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. On the other hand, the applicable ethical issues considered in the study

adherence to the internal institutional reviews, confidentiality and anonymity, autonomy, and the scientific integrity of the research.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study emphasises the relevance, value, and contribution of the particular study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Kumar, 2020). The purpose of the study was to explore the progression or progression of women to senior management positions in an ODeL higher education institutions. In that regard, the findings of this study will contribute to the body of literature in the sphere of gender studies, and particularly in the demystification and shattering of concepts such as the glass ceiling and normalisation of patriarchal power structures generally, and in an ODeL institution.

At the organisational/ institutional level, the study is particularly significant to policymakers and bodies such as Universities South Africa (USAf), previously known as Higher Education South Africa (HESA), as well as the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to comply with and implement the legal prescripts such as the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998). Furthermore, human resources directors, HEI administrators and leaders, union leaders, and employment agencies are involved in the recruitment of marginalised and highly qualified and professional women for management and leadership positions and roles in higher education institutions.

1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher triangulated several theories which provided a lens for data analysis in the current study. The theories included the feminist theory, standpoint theory, equality theory, career mobility theory and career progression theory. Feminist theories profoundly aim at fostering gender equality through the protection of women's rights (Bosch et al., 2019). Feminist theorists also contend that throughout various historical manifestations of patriarchal society, such as feudalism, capitalism, or socialism, there exists a concurrent operation of a sex-gender system and thriving on economic gender discrimination (Savigny, 2019; Thomas et al., 2019). The fundamental tenet of the standpoint theory is that all experiences of an individual, collectively shape the particular individual's socio-political perspectives (Guring, 2022). Furthermore, it is from these experiences that individuals ultimately develop and shape their standpoint or perspective, serving as a lens through which they understand the world (Mohajan, 2022). The primary

objective of standpoint theory is to challenge the initial production of knowledge, which was written from a masculine patriarchal perspective, and thus omitted women's interests and experiences (Guring, 2022). This demonstrates the importance of incorporating the perspectives of women and other subjugated groups into the creation of knowledge. Equality theory emphasises the importance of ensuring that women have the same opportunities for progression within the institution as their male counterparts. This theory would prompt an examination of the institution's policies and practises regarding gender equality in leadership positions. Career mobility theory focuses on understanding how individuals progress within their careers (Sicherman & Galor, 1990). According to this theory, individuals' optimal career paths may involve intrafirm mobility as well as interfirm mobility. Intrafirm mobility (promotion) is subject to the employer's decision, whereas interfirm mobility and its optimal timing are determined by the individuals who choose the optimal quitting time. Career progression theory focuses on the factors that facilitate or hinder an individual's progression in their profession or organisation. Women's career progression faces numerous obstacles, among which the "glass ceiling," stands out as a significant but often overlooked barrier (Kuruppuarachchi & Surangi, 2020; Islam & Jantan, 2017). Career progression theory would also consider the impact of external factors, such as societal attitudes towards women in leadership positions, on women's career progression within the institution.

1.10 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

The chapters of the study are logically and thematically organised and structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Overview of the Study

This chapter presented the introduction, background, motivation, and problem statement of the study. The chapter also addressed the research aim, objectives, and questions, as well as the definition of key concepts, an overview of the research methodology, the significance of the study, and the layout of chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of relevant and existing research on the progression of women to senior managerial positions in higher education institutions. This is implemented in order to determine what was already known about the subject and identify the knowledge lacuna.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion on the study's overall research design, including the adopted philosophical paradigm discussion and research approach as influenced by the IPA perspective. The chapter further provides details of the study population and sampling framework, the data collection methods and analysis procedures, as well as the trustworthiness issues and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

In this chapter, the researcher presents detailed findings of the study in the context of the participants' demographic characteristics and thematic development of the findings accruing from the researcher's interview-based interactions with the participants.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The chapter concludes the study with a review of the main findings in the context of the research objectives, and in consideration of the existing literature consulted in this study. The chapter also entails the researcher's own recommendations emanating from the findings, as well as the possible study limitations identified by the researcher.

1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The current chapter outlined the essential research variables in the context of the introduction, background, motivation, and problem statement of the study. The chapter also addressed the research aim, objectives, and questions, as well as the definition of key concepts, an overview of the research methodology, the significance of the study, and the layout of chapters.

The ensuing chapter focuses entirely on the main issues emanating from the literature reviewed of the progression or progression of women in higher education institutions generally, and open distance e-learning contexts in particular.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review involves locating, reading, evaluating, and summarising the available secondary information sources that are either directly or indirectly related to the study topic under review (Saunders et al., 2019). One of the functions and benefits of literature review is to provide essential facts and information about the topic. It also helps to prevent duplication and supports the development of critical aspects of the study, such as the findings and conclusions. Additionally, it informs researchers about relevant ideas for furthering their study and offers fresh insights into the challenges faced by previous studies. Furthermore, literature review serves as a motivation for researchers to conduct additional research on their subject of interest (Sajeevanie, 2021). Literature can be obtained from various sources, such as conference proceedings, academic books, unpublished and published manuscripts of dissertations and theses, the internet, peer-reviewed journal articles and original research reports, as well as reputable databases and search engines (Sajeevanie, 2021).

The current chapter provides pertinent details regarding the progression or progression of women to senior management positions from multiple scholarship perspectives obtained during the literature review process. Accordingly, the following critical issues are addressed in this chapter, namely: the knowledge gaps in the literature; the theoretical framework; the legislative framework; gender equality and gender equality trends; inherent power structures that limit gender equality in South Africa; barriers impeding women's progression in higher education institutions; as well as measures to address women's progression to management positions.

2.1.1 Observed Gaps in Literature and Knowledge

In essence, the identification of existing gaps in literature and knowledge is also a reflection of the study's significant contribution to research in the field of study being investigated (Mavodza, 2020; Silverman, 2020). Despite the abundance of research in women, gender or feminist studies, the current study has identified that there were three main areas in which further research studies still need to be undertaken in order to narrow the gap between theory and practice in the progression of women in organisational settings.

Accordingly, the identified gaps related to gender stereotyping, the 'glass ceiling' syndrome, as well as patriarchy. It is the view of the present study that, if these three issues are not conclusively investigated, the plight of women in all societies could forever be left to the patriarchal world to dominate. The deluge of existing literature on gender inequality endeavours to establish discrimination against women's progression to senior management positions. In Sub-Saharan Africa, including Swaziland and South Africa, this is a common occurrence (Moalusi & Jones, 2019).

2.1.1.1 Gender stereotyping

Stereotypes refer to either positive and/ or negative generalisations or beliefs regarding the characteristics and behaviours of individuals and/or groups (Marx, Jin & Ko, 2019). For example, female stereotypes include both negative (e.g., excessively emotional, lack of assertiveness) and positive (e.g., nurturing, empathetic) characteristics (Marx et al., 2019). A stereotype is a broad belief about a specific group of individuals. In this study, stereotypes are based on the presumption that women are not necessarily capable of managing and leading institutions of higher learning, irrespective of whether or not these institutions offer distance or contact (in-person) teaching and learning programmes.

Given the above, gender stereotyping in this study relates the widely held belief about the female gender and their inherent behavioural and other attributes that is intended to represent the entire group (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). These notions or beliefs may or may not be reflective of reality. Gender stereotyping is considered to be a significant issue obstructing the career progressions of women in management (Hentschel et al., 2019). There are various types of expectations, including those regarding the group's demeanour, preferences, appearance, or capacity. Sometimes, stereotypes are oversimplified, inaccurate, and resistant to new information, but may be accurate in some instances.

Existing within psychology and other disciplines are various conceptualisations and theories of stereotyping, which at times share commonalities and contain contradictory aspects (Stewart, 2020; Toni & Moodly, 2019). Even in the social sciences and certain sub-disciplines of psychology, stereotypes are occasionally reproduced and can be identified theories, such as assumptions about other cultures. The beliefs about the characteristics of a group are referred to as stereotype content. Research on stereotype

content focuses on what people believe of others, rather than examining the causes and mechanisms of stereotyping.

Gender inequalities within higher education continue because the male gendered leadership is failing to adequately address these inequalities. As a result, gender stereotypes and gender bias greatly impact women's progression to senior management positions (Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2019). Furthermore, culturally assigned gender roles and invisible organisational barriers prevent women from progressing to senior leadership positions in society; hence, the majority of women of a certain culture are expected to be submissive to their male counterparts and are considered 'naturally' unfit for higher positions (Moalusi & Jones, 2019; Stewart, 2020).

In higher education, women still encounter stereotypically influenced obstacles such as societal and institutional beliefs that they are not meant to lead, and that they need to prioritise family obligations and responsibilities (Mwashita et al. 2020). Notably, childrearing breaks coincide with crucial periods of career development, and women have less travel latitude than men. The stereotypes are enhanced further by the perception that women are better adapted to compassionate roles than decision-making roles.

2.1.1.2 The glass ceiling syndrome

The term, 'glass ceiling' was coined in the mid-1980s and refers to as an invisible barrier or limit in organisations that inhibits women's progression or progression to senior management and other leadership and responsibility positions (Kuruppuarachi & Surangi, 2020; Toni & Moodly, 2019). In the view of Mans-Kemp (2019) the glass ceiling could in some instances be associated with 'the golden skirt syndrome', a situation in which only a few well-connected women are selected to serve on higher leadership roles on basis that are remotely connected to the professional requirements of the position itself. These could relate to their physical looks or appearance and dress code.

The 'golden skirt' phenomenon is also associated with 'the queen-bee syndrome', with women who obtained management positions due to their physical appearance and beauty frequently impede the professional progression of other women who were not accorded that same 'privilege' or 'status' as an employment criterion (April & Sikatali, 2019; Moodly, 2022).

2.1.1.3 Patriarchy

Patriarchy is commonly defined as an inequitable social structure that imposes oppression upon women. The distinction between masculinity and femininity is a manifestation of patriarchal ideology, representing the political dichotomy between freedom and subordination (Savigny, 2019; Thomas et al., 2019). Furthermore, the term 'patriarchy' has undergone a redefinition during the last twenty years in order to examine the historical roots and current circumstances surrounding the subjugation of women by men (Hill & Allen, 2021).

In predominantly traditional contexts, 'patriarchy' essentially denotes the authority of the father or male figure as the leader of the home. However, within the context of post-1960s feminism, the term has come to signify the structured arrangement of male dominance and female subjugation (Bhopal, 2019; Pierik, 2022). Over time, the concept has been delineated as a hierarchical structure wherein male dominance is exerted, leading to the subjugation and control of women throughout social, political, economic, and other domains.

In many research findings, men are traditionally portrayed as masculine and competent, and women as compassionate and feminine, limiting and hindering their ascendance to certain career progression opportunities (Mwashita et al., 2020; Oosthuizen, Tonelli & Mayer, 2019). The latter perspective suggests that males, in contrast to females, are perceived as competent and thus linked to productivity, while females exhibit a social inclination towards nurturing that is not explicitly focused on tasks. Therefore, it is clear that compassion is linked to caring for individuals whose contributions may not be immediately obvious (Babic & Hansez, 2021). Therefore, the gender disparity appears to be reflected in men and women's biological differences, as well as in social and modern organisational settings.

In essence, therefore, patriarchy could be viewed as a form of mental, social, spiritual, economic, and political organisation or structuring of society produced by the gradual institutionalisation of sex-based political relations that have been created, reinforced and maintained by various institutions linked solely by the goal of achieving consensus concerning the perceived inferiority of women and their roles (Bhopal, 2019; Hill & Allen, 2021; Pierik, 2022).

2.2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY

The progression of women to high management positions has been analysed and explained using a variety of theoretical frameworks (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Seale et al., 2021). Moreover, several theoretical frameworks, including feminist and gender theories, have been applied to the progression or progression of women in all sectors and domains in society. Given its major focus and spheres of investigation, the study is then grounded on feminist theory, which is one of the most contemporary gender-based theories exploring male-female gender interactions and perceptions (Guring, 2020; Huirem et al., 2020). Basically, feminist theory is reflective of ideas founded on the notion of women's power, independence, and non-subordination to patriarch and chauvinistic male domination or control that evaluates females on their relational or sexual essence only (Huirem et al., 2020; Savigny, 2019). Complementarily, the study also incorporated perspectives of the standpoint theory.

2.2.1 Feminist Theory

Feminist theories profoundly aim at fostering gender equality through the protection of women's rights (Bosch et al., 2019). Feminist theorists also contend that throughout various historical manifestations of patriarchal society, such as feudalism, capitalism, or socialism, there exists a concurrent operation of a sex gender system and thriving on economic gender discrimination (Savigny, 2019; Thomas et al., 2019). It is in the latter context that, within feminist philosophy, the notion of patriarchy and male supremacy over women is vehemently opposed. Therefore, feminist theory commonly conceptualises patriarchy as a societal construct that may be transcended through the process of unveiling and critically examining its various expressions (Bhopal, 2019).

Women have an enormous contribution to make in every aspect of life. However, their oppression owing to their gender meant that their potential is largely unrealised. Therefore, the feminist theory serves as the theoretical foundation for the investigation of institutionalised gender bias, discrimination, and prejudice. In that context, understanding organisational dynamics would assist women in understanding the forces and factors that shape gender discourses, assisting them to find ways to navigate the leadership ladder (Guring, 2020). Feminists argue that inequalities and the perpetuation of male dominance in organisational structures should be eliminated (Sulkowski & Marjanski, 2019).

Therefore, it is necessary to eliminate unequal power relations and the culture of masculinity to pave the way for women's progression by cultivating a culture of equality.

Guring (2020) and Mohajan (2022) contend that is largely through radical feminism and Marxist-socialist feminism that women would be able to confront and defeat the patriarchal culture that has for long suppressed calls for equality between men and women. Conversely, the Marxist-socialist feminist perspective argues that gender equality is possible if capitalist society ceases, as it might lead to unequal pay and obstacles for women to excel.

2.2.2 Standpoint Theory

The fundamental tenet of the standpoint theory is that all experience of an individual, collectively shape the particular individual's socio-political perspectives (Guring, 2022). Furthermore, it is on the basis of these experiences that the individual ultimately creates and forms a standpoint or point of view through which to understand the world (Mohajan, 2022). The primary objective of standpoint theory is to challenge the initial production of knowledge, which was written from a masculine patriarchal perspective, and thus omitted women's interests and experiences (Guring, 2022). This demonstrates the importance of incorporating the perspectives of women and other subjugated groups into the creation of knowledge. The feminist standpoint epistemology requires researchers to place women at the centre of the research process, with women's concrete experiences serving as the foundation upon which to build knowledge (Guring, 2022; Mohajan, 2022).

Furthermore, feminist standpoint theory seeks to develop a feminist epistemology, or theory of knowledge, which is a vital epistemological instrument for constructing effective knowledge from the insights of women's experience. Standpoint theory demonstrates that women have a unique form of knowledge since their lives and roles in nearly all societies are vastly different from those of men (Molyneux et al., 2021). Moreover, women's status as a subordinate group enables them to perceive and comprehend the world in more innovative and challenging ways compared to the existing male-centred conventional wisdom.

Overall, both the feminist and standpoint theories employ the conflict and disempowerment approaches to analyse the reinforcement of gender roles and inequalities, highlighting the role of patriarchy in sustaining women's oppression. As such,

the study applied standpoint theory because it focuses on the theory of patriarchy as a system of power that organises society into a complex of relationships based on the assertion of masculine superiority (Molyneux et al., 2021). In addition, the researcher used standpoint theory in this study because it investigates the social roles, experiences, and interests of women and seeks to comprehend the nature of gender inequality. This research was facilitated by standpoint theory, a critique of social relations that focuses on analysing gender inequality and advancing women's interests.

These theories would assist the researcher in comprehending how intersecting aspects of individual identities, such as gender, history influence the representation of reality concerning the progression of women to higher positions within institutions of higher education. Utilising Smith's (1992) standpoint theory, the experiences of women in management positions at an OdeL institution were analysed. The standpoint theory emphasises self-reflection for women to understand themselves (Molyneux et al., 2021).

2.2.3 Equality Theory

Gender equality is a human right (United Nations, 2022) and requires equal conditions, equal treatment and equal opportunities for women and men, girls and boys to realise their full potential and contribute to and benefit from local resources and opportunities. Gender equality theory emphasises the importance of ensuring that women have the same opportunities for progression within the institution as their male counterparts. Currie & De Waal (2013) describe equality as the idea that people who are similarly placed in relevant respects should be treated similarly. Understanding the value of equality requires the implementation of substantive equality. This theory would require an examination of the institution's policies and practises related to gender equality in leadership positions. It would examine whether there are systemic barriers, such as gender bias in hiring or promotion decisions, that hinder women's progression. In addition, gender equality theory would assess the availability of support systems and initiatives aimed at overcoming the challenges women face in attaining leadership positions, such as mentoring programmes or gender-specific strategies.

2.2.4 Career Mobility Theory

Career mobility theory focuses on understanding how individuals progress within their careers (Sicherman & Galor, 1990). According to this theory, an individual's optimal career path can include both intra-organisational and inter-organisational mobility. Intra-

organisational mobility (promotion) is subject to the employer's decision, while inter-organisational mobility and its optimal timing are determined by the individuals who choose the optimal time for their exit. The likelihood of promotion within a company is a function of education, skills and work experience. Applied to the context of women in senior positions in the e-learning institution, this theory would analyse the opportunities available to women to advance to leadership positions. It would assess factors such as access to training and development programmes, networking opportunities and the transparency of promotion processes. Career mobility theory would also examine any structural or cultural barriers that may hinder women's career progression, such as a lack of flexible work arrangements or limited visibility of female role models in leadership positions.

2.2.5 Career Progression Theory

The theory of career progression focuses on the factors that facilitate or hinder a person's progression in their profession or organisation. Women's career progression is hindered by a number of factors. One of the invisible barriers that women face in their career progression is the "glass ceiling'," which is often referred to (Kuruppuarachchi and Surangi, 2020; Islam and Jantan, 2017). According to Wirth's (2004) definition, the "glass ceiling" is an invisible obstacle to women's career progression that is characterised by individual attitudes and prejudices. Lack of self-confidence is one of the individual barriers that prevent women from advancing in their careers (Worrall et al., 2010). Risk aversion and uncertainty are common among women, which may be related to their preferred career paths (Kuruppuarachchi & Surangi, 2020). Another hindrance to women's career progression is organisational practices, such as organisational culture and structure (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010). According to Ismail and Ibrahim (2008), organisations are largely male-dominated, with little attention paid to women's needs. In addition to, Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) and Kuruppuarachchi and Surangi (2020), women place greater responsibility on their families. Work-life balance and the conflict between family responsibilities and employment roles are linked to the focus on family. Changes in global workforce dynamics and talent investments increased the demand for women's leadership development programmes to eliminate women's underrepresentation in leadership programmes (Debebe, Anderson, Bilmoria, & Vinnicombe, 2016). According to Kanter's (1993) theory of structural empowerment, groups are promoted in work

environments in which they have access to learning and development opportunities, among other things. According to this theory, jobs that are highly visible and central to the purpose of the organisation, such as leadership positions, facilitate opportunities for meaningful work through informal and formal support alliances (Orgambídez-Ramos & Borrego-Alés, 2014). In a male-dominated environment, women who participate in training are more likely to experience increased social networking activities, self-confident behaviour and positive psychological states (Pereira, 2017). Women's career progression can counteract men's traditional career models, which are characterised by stability, maintenance and decline. Women are significantly more susceptible to social and contextual challenges that hinder their career progression (Ellemers, 2014). Due to insufficient alignment between individual career planning and organisational development and career progression practices, female leaders may be overlooked for promotion to leadership positions (Schulz & Enslin, 2014). Chun et al (2019) found that gender and stereotypical gender roles influence female employees' overall career planning, career progression and client relationships. In the context of women in leadership positions in the e-learning institution, this theory would examine the organisational practises and cultural norms that influence women's career progression. It would assess factors such as performance appraisal criteria, mentoring opportunities and the inclusiveness of the organisational culture. Career progression theory would also consider the impact of external factors, such as societal attitudes towards women in leadership positions, on women's career progression within the institution.

2.3 GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

While women occupy leadership positions, they are still underrepresented in executive positions (Seale et al., 2021). Males continue to dominate executive positions in South African higher education, resulting in the marginalisation of women (Gallagher & Morison, 2019; Moodly, 2021; Shinbrot et al., 2019). In this section, the researcher presents gender equality statistics, institutionalised gender equality and inequity, as well as the state of gender equality in the higher education institutional context.

2.3.1 Gender Equality Statistics

Statistics indicate that women outnumber males in South Africa, which has a population of 62 million, 51.5% of which are women and 48.5% men (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Nevertheless, women continue to be underrepresented in positions of authority and

influence, despite comprising slightly more than half of the population. Consequently, the South African Constitution upholds gender equality as a fundamental principle, affirming that men and women should be treated with equal status and respect. According to Statistics South Africa (2017), the Gender Equality Bill and Women Empowerment suggests an equal distribution of power, authority, and decision-making roles with a 50/50 split between men and women.

Despite the progress in South Africa's pursuit of gender equality, there are still significant disparities that need to be addressed. From 2002 to 2017, Statistics South Africa (2017) recorded that 44% female individuals were employed. This equates to women constituting 44% of the labour force, although this proportion has remained unchanged for more than a decade. Despite the Gender Equality Bill Women Empowerment advocating for equal representation, it is clear that South Africa has not yet achieved a 50/50 ratio for positions of substantial power and authority.

Waruru (2023) indicates that 21% of women are chancellors in the 97 top ranking universities, 14% are vice-chancellors, and 26% women registrars. Universities headed by women are not more than 25% in South Africa. The ability of women to assume the role of critical decision-making is hindered by the significant challenge. Kapareliotis and Miliopoulou (2019) establish that women do not advance beyond the Assistant Professor level, and as one ascends the hierarchy, the proportion of women decreases. Very little progress is made by South Africa in reducing or eliminating the unequal representation of women in senior management positions, despite the ideological and policy commitments to gender equality (Ramohai, 2019).

There are more women who have graduated in South Africa's higher education institutions than men, as is the case globally. In South African public institutions between 2012 and 2017, women were the majority at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Gallagher & Morison, 2019). Despite this, women continue to hold the preponderance of middle management positions, and senior/ executive levels continue to face obstacles (Gallagher & Morison, 2019; Shinbrot et al., 2019).

As depicted in Figure 2.1 overleaf, women remain underrepresented in senior management positions at these institutions.
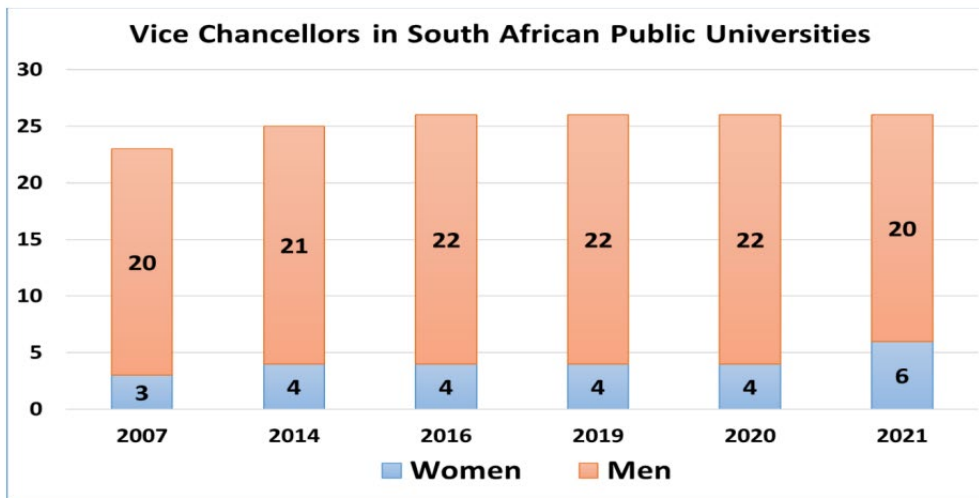
Figure 2.1: Number of men and women in senior management positions in South African public universities
(Source: Gallagher & Morison, 2019).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the number of women in Senior Management positions from 2007 to 2021. Six (6) of the twenty-six (26) senior managers, or 23%, were women. In 2020, 2019, and 2016, the proportion was 15.38% (4 of 26). In 2014, 16% (4/25) of the senior managers were women, according to a desktop review conducted by Toni and Moodly (2019). However, this number had decreased by 2020. In 2007, 13% of the twenty-three (23) Senior Managers were women.

2.3.2 Perspectives on Gender Equality and Equity in South Africa

Due to their lack of experience in public contexts, females typically lack the self-confidence and skills necessary to function effectively in formal leadership roles. In light of this, contemporary women encounter gender disparities and unfair discrimination that prevent them from holding positions of power and authority, and those who have achieved such positions are still subject to masculine approval and subordination (Seale et al., 2021). The Department of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities (2019) asserts that South African women have a long history of being subjected to oppression, discrimination, patriarchy, subjugation, and suffering and that the Constitution provides a framework to guide the introduction of policies and legislation that seek to enforce transformation because of this history.

The Department of Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities (2019) states that the introduced policies and laws aim to achieve non-discriminatory, non-sexist, equal, and fair gender representation of women and their full participation in decision-making, national government structures, and leadership positions. The primary concern is whether this is accomplished through legislation and policies (De Laquil, 2021). Our organisations are struggling to achieve gender representation in leadership positions, and the Department acknowledges that women still face obstacles. Researchers and academicians must conduct important research and offer practical recommendations to help organisations achieve policy and legal goals (Gallagher & Morison, 2019; Shinbrot et al., 2019).

The Beijing Action Plan recommendations were enacted into law following the 2019 conference. These recommendations reflect the government recognition of gender disparities and the challenges faced by women in different fields. Specific objectives have been established in key governance and political areas to improve representation, active participation of women and their progression in influential roles and critical decision-making processes as outlined in the Beijing Action Plan. These targets also focus on the achievement of gender parity in the public and private sectors.

South Africa fulfilled its obligation to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development by achieving a minimum 30% representation of women in politics during the 1999 national elections. By March 2005, the goal of achieving 30% female representation at SMS level in the public service was reached. Furthermore, Cabinet subsequently sanctioned the adoption of the 50/50 principle, mandating equitable gender representation at the SMS level within the Public Service, and extending this principle's application to encompass all strata of political, leadership, and decision-making domains, including the private sector (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2019).

2.3.3 Gender Equality in the Higher Education Institutional Context

The inequality between men and women in higher education has become a concern globally. As such, global and domestic literature reflects structural and cultural aspects of the higher education milieu as experienced by women in both academia and a pathway of leadership. Gallaher and Morison (2019) aver that historically all institutions were

developed by and for women, which implies that universities are gendered institutions. The proportion of women in leadership positions in developing countries has not increased (Mdleleni et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that women in leadership positions continue to struggle to gain support (Gallagher & Morison, 2019; Mdleleni et al., 2021). Since women are expected to conform to masculine standards, their progression to Senior Management positions remains difficult as several organisations are fundamentally male gendered (Mdleleni et al., 2021; Shinbrot et al., 2019).

In recent years, perceptions have shifted towards androgynous leadership styles which promotes a balance of both masculine and feminine characteristics. However, research findings indicate that women continue to experience societal patriarchal structures of masculine values, power, and dominance (Shinbrot et al., 2019). This includes, but is not limited to, the preponderance of men in positions of authority in the workplace and systemic challenges within existing university structures. Women are then expected to adopt masculine leadership standards because they are commonly perceived as emotive and subjective, whereas men have to act out of character to be taken seriously because they are perceived as objective and rational (Mdleleni et al., 2021).

Despite the concomitant efforts regarding the progression of women to positions of leadership, the central question is whether being a woman hinders leadership success in higher education in South Africa. Scholars refer to the escalation of problems for women in leadership positions in higher education as a phenomenon that requires special consideration, particularly in developing nations such as South Africa, where gender inequality and stereotypes impact women in higher education leadership positions the most (Herbst, 2020; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021).

Despite research supporting women leaders, higher education leadership positions in South Africa are rarely held by women (Hlatshwayo et al., 2022). Due to the unequal representation of men and women in leadership roles in higher education institutions, the leadership position of women continues to decline (Toni & Moodly, 2019; Mdleleni et al., 2021). The underrepresentation of women in higher education's leadership positions might impact the ability of colleges and universities to employ, develop, and retain exceptional and diverse faculty members, and thus, the excellence and diversity of future leaders (Larsson & Alvinius, 2020).

2.4 INHERENT POWER STRUCTURES IMPEDING WOMEN'S PROGRESSION TO MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

A number of scholars lament the continuing dearth of women in leadership positions in various societal domains, despite the women's numerical majority in many societies (Gallagher & Morison 2019; Shinbrot et al., 2019). Minor variations in the executive positions of South African public universities reflect the patriarchal nature of society, which continues to perpetuate male dominance in leadership.

Gallagher and Morison (2019) assert that all institutions through history were largely created by men for their own benefit. Until the middle of the 20th century, women's access to universities, did not necessarily facilitate societal change. Therefore, the 'journeys' of women to leadership positions was not the same as their male counterparts and typically occurs later (Gallagher & Morison 2019:4). This is due to a variety of factors, including the traditional expectation that family obligations take precedence (Gallagher & Morison 2019; Shinbrot et al. 2019). Therefore, women do not always reach the same developmental milestones as men at the same chronological age. On that note, Gallagher and Morison (2019, p.4) argue that "perceptions of leadership behaviours are embedded in organisational culture" and are primarily associated with "masculine behaviours".

An additional barrier is presented by the fact that the behaviour traits which men consider to be "attractive" are not deemed so by women". Meanwhile, Shinbrot et al. (2019:122) highlighted that women who acted outside the orthodox gender norms were most likely to encounter unpleasant consequences. In addition, women in fields dominated by men were usually devalued and less admired and as successful leaders. In such contexts, women contribute a servant-leadership style that has not been fully accepted as an effective leadership style at senior levels, although this may not be a generalisation. This leadership style is influenced by the traditional societal roles expected of women, such as "childbearing and care giving to their own families (and) extended families", and it often extends into the workplace (Toni & Moodly, 2019, p.186).

In addition, the servant leadership style employs a form of gentle persuasion that also embraces caring and service-orientedness (Toni & Moodly 2019). In contrast, Shinbrot et

al. (2019, p.122) indicated that there is evidence of the shifted towards androgynous or hybrid leadership styles which embrace and balance both feminine and masculine characteristics. However, Shinbrot et al. (2019) argue that there has not been full acceptance of the androgynous leadership style, which poses an obstacle to the prospects of women ascending to leadership positions because most organisations were still fundamentally male dominated and imbued with patriarchal values of masculine power and dominance.

2.4.1 Patriarchy in the Context of Women Management Discourse

Various authors in literature have provided different definitions of the concept of patriarchy. As a concept, patriarch is derived from the Greek word '*patriarkhes'*, which translates to terms such as 'father's rule', 'chief of race, or 'father of race' (Larsson & Alvinius, 2020). According to Cross et al. (2019), patriarchy is nuanced and refers to a social organisation that is characterised by the dominance of the father figure's authority in the family and the legal reliance of spouses and children. Patriarchy was originally embedded within a domestic structure, and it refers to the systematic organisation of male superiority and female subordination. This implies that patriarchy is a system of social stratification and differentiation based on sex that provides material advantages to males while severely limiting the roles and activities of females (Cross et al., 2019).

Patriarchy leads to unequal power dynamics between genders, where women are subservient to men and face systematic disadvantages and oppression. This is demonstrated by the lack of female representation in important leadership roles in government institutions, employment, and various industries (Kapareliotis & Miliopoulou, 2019). The latter situation is influenced by a patriarchal view of women as physically, intellectually and morally inferior to their male counterparts. Women are typically assigned domestic responsibilities like cleaning and child-rearing, tending to men's sexual and physical needs, while being deemed unfitting for prominent managerial and leadership positions (Kapareliotis & Miliopoulou, 2019). This study utilised scholars' definitions of patriarchy to explore the gender-based challenges faced by women managers and the reasons for their marginalisation due to their gender.

This study sought to determine the reasons contributing to the marginalisation of women administrators and the gender-based barriers they encounter in organisations. Gender

disparities have persisted over time as a result of societal, domestic, and organisational perceptions of women. The marginalisation problem arises from patriarchy, where women are forced to be subordinate to men in different areas. (Kapareliotis & Miliopoulou, 2019). Due to their cultural position in many modern societies, women continue to face a variety of gendered obstacles and are marginalised. As such, it was of the uttermost importance for this study to investigate the concept of patriarchy in relation to the daily experiences of women in positions of power and authority in organisations.

The belief in male superiority across various cultures has long been a significant element. (Mdelelani et al., 2021). This ideology implies that a male is a naturally endowed and appointed head of the household, and that men are superior to women. Due to the patriarchal culture, men are typically not expected to take on domestic duties like raising children. Furthermore, it is thought that these duties are intrinsic to women.

2.4.2 Gender Stereotypes and Prejudices

The influence of gendered stereotypes on women's perceptions of career obstacles in the workplace is another form of difficulty they face (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021). Using stereotypes based on gender, society can establish career barriers for women. Gender stereotypes are still prevalent in the workplace, but they are more socially expressed (Toni & Moodly, 2019). Occasionally, the presentation of stereotypical imagery for women in the workplace is subtle, while at other times it is overt. Gender stereotypes illustrate a permanent, skewed generalisation of women produced by society. Employers perpetuate societal stereotypes by employing gendered stereotypes as a form of gender discrimination (Bangani et al., 2020).

Gender stereotypes plague the workforce and negatively impact women's career opportunities (Adeniji et al., 2019). Negative gender stereotypes, such as disparaging working mothers, pregnancy, and stay-at-home mothers, can hinder women's opportunities for progression. In studies on gender perceptions and professional beliefs, it has been established that bias, gender perceptions, and women who have children frequently impede women's progression opportunities.

Mdleleni et al. (2021) found that the most significant obstacles to recruiting women for employment were the preconceived notions that leaders held about women and employment. The perception that successful organisational administrators base their company's structure on masculine hierarchical chains of command is a further example of a stereotype. Men are seen as more effective leaders than women. Women who do not conform to the female stereotype are less favoured and less effective. In contrast, successful female leaders tend to employ androgynous leadership styles that incorporate masculine and feminine stereotypes of leadership (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023).

2.5 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The legislative framework in this section is presented and discussed in the context of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), the Employment Equity Act (No 55 of 1998), the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, (No. 4 of 2000), as well as the White Paper on Affirmative Action, No. 564 of 1998.

2.5.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) is regarded as the nation's supreme law, governing nearly every aspect of human existence and mandating adherence by every citizen. Moreover, organisational policies and laws must align with and not conflict with the Constitution (South African Government, 1996).

Chapter 2, Section 9(2) of the Constitution supports achieving equality and promoting the progress of historically marginalised groups, while Section 2(3) prohibits. discrimination based on "race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and place of birth" (South African Government, 1996). In addition, Section 23(1) of Chapter 2 of the Constitution stipulates that everyone is entitled to equitable labour practises. As such, it allows women to hold positions of authority, participate in decision-making and without facing unnecessary obstacles. The Constitution mandates gender equality and encourages organisations to be non-discriminatory, non-sexist, and non-racial.

2.5.2 Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998

Organisations, especially those that are state-owned, should uphold, encourage, adhere to, and be compliant with all laws, regulations, and policies that were created with the intention and intent of correcting and balancing past imbalances. Such adherence is consistent with the principles and intent of the democratic order. For these purposes, the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998), also known as an EEA within state-owned organisations, was enacted. It aimed at balancing gender inequality within organisations and implement corrective measures to address employment disparities at all organisational levels.

The Department of Labour (DoL, 2019) outlined the following fundamental purposes and objectives for the creation of the Act:

(i) To promote the right to equality under the Constitution;

(ii) To eliminate unjust discrimination in employment;

(iii) To assure the implementation of employment equity to mitigate discrimination's effects;

(iv) To attain a workforce that is diverse and representative of the population as a whole; and

(v) To promote economic growth and workforce efficiency and to fulfil the Republic's obligations as a member of the International Labour Organisation.

If organisations can promote, comply with, and adhere to this Act, they can work towards achieving gender equality and equitable treatment for all employees, regardless of their gender, race, age, religion, or culture.

2.5.3 Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, No. 4 of 2000

South Africa is a democratic nation that requires the elimination of all social and economic disparities, particularly those considered systemic. Patriarchy, colonisation and apartheid have perpetuated inequalities, causing agony and suffering for the majority of people, particularly children and women and children. In an endeavour to eradicate apartheid's vestiges, the government promulgated the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No. 4 of 2000) which is consistent with Section 9(23) of the South African Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996). Accordingly, implementation, enforcement,

and dissemination of the Act across all organisations is intended to achieve the following stated goals:

(i) Prevent and prohibit all forms of discrimination and harassment based on gender; and

(ii) To promote a culture of equality by eradicating unjust discrimination, to prevent and prohibit hate speech, and to enact related regulations.

Measurable progress has been made in the pursuit of a non-discriminatory workplace, but inequalities, patriarchy, and unjust treatment of women still exist to some extent. The majority of our organisations are not near to achieving a 50/50 gender representation in management and leadership positions, indicating that injustice still exists and that our organisations are not doing enough to eliminate such injustices and inequalities.

2.5.4 White Paper on Affirmative Action, No. 564 of 1998

The White Paper on Affirmative Action was created to achieve a national and provincial public service that is representative and equitable. It is intended to create an environment that supports and enables those who have been historically disadvantaged and excluded by unfair discrimination to reach their full potential within the publics, so that service delivery can maximise the benefits of their diverse skills and abilities. Within the framework of the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998), and other pertinent labour and relevant public service laws, the objective of Affirmative Action is established. The following goals are enumerated in the policy on affirmative action:

(i) Improve the capabilities of the historically disadvantaged by formulating and implementing policies that facilitate their progression within the Public Service;

(ii) Inculcate within the Public Service a culture that values diversity and encourages the affirmation of those who have been historically discriminated against; and

(iii) Accelerate the achievement and enhancement of the quantitative objectives enumerated in the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service.

In addition to establishing a legal framework that supports the concept of equality, the South African government has also established several structures with the responsibility of advancing human rights and gender equality. Among the structures are the Children, and People Living with Disabilities, the Parliamentary Committee on Women Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE).

2.6 BARRIERS IMPEDING WOMEN PROGRESSION TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT

There are two primary categories of barriers to women's progression to senior management positions: societal barriers and business-specific barriers (Grant, 2019; Huang, Krivkovich, Starikova, Yee & Zanoschi, 2019). The barriers are categorised to better understand their importance regarding women in public leadership roles. It is important to emphasise that these obstacles are widespread across all management levels, not limited to the executive level. These barriers occur concurrently and are largely arbitrary. Disaggregating the barriers increases comprehension of these obstacles and enables a focused examination of each obstacle within the hierarchy of leadership (Oosthuizen et al., 2019).

2.6.1 Structural Barriers

Structural barriers are major obstacles in situations where cultural influence in the workplace is more dominant than the basic barriers in male-dominated hierarchical workplace philosophies. (Lwesi, 2019; Priyadharshini et al., 2021). Social and cultural activities that uphold established norms and values that exclude women in particular public milieus appear to be the main factor influencing barriers to women's progression to senior management positions (Mwashita et al., 2020). The policy and culture of corporations tend to glorify masculinity in favour of male decisions, perpetuating discrimination against women. As a result of masculine bias, women who aspire to leadership positions are frequently constrained by requirements beyond competence and knowledge. Promotion policies may be vaguely worded in order to permit male leadership chauvinism and manipulation.

As a result, women face unwarranted pressure to comply with coerced relationships. Structural barriers that obstruct women's progression in leadership positions stem from the implicit expectation to develop strong relationships with male superiors to progress in their careers (Cohen et al., 2020). The prevalence of multiple roles in patriarchal societies, negative perceptions of subordinates, and a general risk aversion among women are additional obstacles women face on their path to leadership. Hence, women develop less confidence. Furthermore, the presence of hierarchical levels leads to the creation of distinct status systems at various levels, which creates obstacles that hinder women's progression into leadership roles (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

In this regard, the researcher observed that the hierarchical positioning of women relative to their female counterparts in leadership roles, which manifests as the 'queen bee syndrome.' This phenomenon describes the tendency of newly promoted women to distance themselves from other female colleagues. Consequently, female subordinates often harbour negative perceptions of female leaders during and post-promotion (Fitong-Ketchiwou et al., 2022). This dual perspective forms a complex obstacle to women's progress in leadership roles, potentially amplifying existing challenges. The identified barriers appear to demonstrate the extent of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within the public sector, as women adopt we-can-live-with-it mentality. As a result, the majority of men in positions of authority typically dominate women on such grounds (Mwashita et al., 2020).

Generally, women face myriad challenges in the workplace, and these challenges impact adversely on their skills development and career and management progression (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2019). These obstacles become formidable for women leaders, diminishing their attempts at self-confidence in the face of masculinity and isolating leadership opportunities. Women are typically skilled in specific domestic tasks assigned to them based on historical labour divisions, and any attempt to deviate from these roles may face opposition (World Economic Forum, 2020). Gender barriers rooted in traditional norms and market imperfections tend to favour masculinity, leading to a widening gender leadership gap (Moalusi & Jones, 2019).

Evidently, some organisations have developed standards for reward systems based on hours worked that put women at a disadvantage because of inflexible work schedules and seniority. In traditional communities, women performed more domestic duties, such as providing for their children, spouses and other members of the family. As these domestic responsibilities place a heavy burden on women, men tend to assume that adding additional work responsibilities will hinder their ability to perform domestic tasks more effectively (Mwashita et al., 2020). The study shows that workplace diversity enhances organisational performance, especially in companies with female Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and a higher representation of women on corporate boards (Alexander, 2019; Oosthuizen et al., 2019). There appears to be evidence at the senior manager level, but it is scarce at the intermediate and front-line levels. In the absence of quantitative evidence to support these assertions, it is evident that women are

underrepresented at the senior levels, posing additional barriers to women's leadership. Ideological differences exist between men and women in the workplace, where men tend to undervalue women in male-dominated sectors and women tend to support male leadership dominance. Therefore, women are marginalised due to the perception that they do not belong in the leadership domain, where they are outnumbered by men (Moalusi & Jones, 2019). Clearly, Patriarchal ideologies dictate that women must adhere to behaviour that aligns with male-established norms.

Therefore, the competence of women in these situations is questionable, since they are not accustomed to 'gender blind' approaches and practices. Based on these cultural beliefs and women's underrepresentation, these barriers reinforce one another (Rapuano, 2020; Oosthuizen et al., 2019). To address male-dominated cultures, increasing the presence of women in such environments and implementing explicit diversity policies that recognise and value their contributions and influence could help mitigate the challenge. Gender theorists prioritise diversity promotion for its positive impact on innovation, design, and productivity.

2.6.2 Prevailing Perceptions and Traditions

Cultural beliefs and biological differences hinder women's ability to be in leadership positions (Gannouni & Ramboarison-Lalao, 2019). The patriarchal ideology perceives women as submissive individuals who are required to yield to men, hindering male subordinates from changing the existing state of affairs. It is probable that women will provide effective leadership, thus contradicting patriarchal cultural beliefs that have been largely based on their natural biological endowments. Men are often seen as primary providers and tend to display increased levels of aggression, assertiveness, and independence. In contrast, women, who have been traditionally linked to domestic roles, are now being acknowledged as effective leaders in modern organisational environments (Rapuano, 2020; Oosthuizen et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, these arguments imply that individuals have distinct perspectives on the masculinity of the leadership role. Despite obstacles to women advancing into leadership positions, research shows that women frequently demonstrate better administrative skills than men. However, additional empirical evidence is needed to definitively support this claim (Mwashita et al., 2020). When the work-life balance capabilities of female leaders

are evaluated, the argument is further undermined. Previous studies highlighted that it is difficult for women with full-time jobs to reconcile work and family obligations (Moodly, 2021). It is likely that either the workplace or the household will suffer, with the workplace being the more likely target (Moodly, 2021). This perpetuates the view that women are viewed as more fragile, lenient, and uncommitted to extracurricular activities than men (Mwashita et al., 2020).

2.6.3 Masculine Work Culture and Leadership

Culture is pervasive in all societies around the world, and is typically viewed as a vague phenomenon comprising the shared experiences of individuals (Giacomin, Tskhay & Rule, 2022). Furthermore, culture is complex and consists of acquired knowledge, beliefs, and principles. Beliefs typically accelerate the necessity of upholding a society's deemed permissible values.

Beliefs entrenched in cultural orientations often present formidable barriers and hurdles for aspiring women leaders, suggesting that any attempt to shift perspectives will inevitably encounter resistance (Koburtay et al. 2019; Moriarty, 2019). Historically, masculinity and the idea that men make better leaders than women have been associated with leadership. Wood (2019) emphasises that despite lengthy struggles against gender discrimination, women eventually gained the right to education through government acts, the opening of facilities willing to educate them, and the opportunity to pursue higher education despite that women have demonstrated their competence as pedagogical leaders. They are still frequently discouraged by the masculine work culture and their male co-workers.

The majority of leadership positions are described using gendered terms, indicating that men are viewed as more qualified for these roles, regardless of whether the position is in a traditionally male-dominated or female-dominated field (Mwashita et al., 2020). Men usually escalate their progression to the corporate hierarchy, leaving women to navigate external perceptions while riding the glass escalator slowly. Despite the perception that women have made significant progress towards parity in attaining senior positions, women remain underrepresented in these positions (Wood, 2019).

2.6.4 Prejudices and Discrimination

Prejudices, biases, stereotypes, and discrimination are interrelated and serve to characterise the attitudes of social groups (Espi et al., 2019). Biases include being hostile and unwilling to acknowledge the actions of group members based on their conscious beliefs, emotions, and attitudes. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the historical belief that men are the primary breadwinners accentuates the condition of dependence observed in women and impedes their potential for leadership (Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020).

The political changes in Europe, where prominent women are involved in decision-making, are inspiring African women in politics and public enterprises to take on leadership roles and influence cultural practises. An inclusive leadership style is expected to include people of all genders by making conscious changes aimed at transforming existing cultural and historical perspectives. Women are discriminated against primarily because of their gender and social orientation. It seems that women also discriminate against men (Fitong-Ketchiwou et al., 2022).

However, Discrimination against women in the workplace is widespread, and men also face domestic discrimination due to women primarily taking on most of the housework. The above observations appear to be firmly rooted in the conventional background and might be resistant to change, necessitating a thorough examination of the phenomenon under investigation. These perceptions result in a social categorisation that leads to prejudice between the genders, which exacerbates discrimination in the form of the 'those' and 'us' syndrome (Gallagher & Morison, 2019).

It may be of interest to note that these evaluations are equally attributed to men and women, leading to the belief that the solution to this dilemma resides within the genders. Discrimination and prejudice are by-products of the society-sustaining culture at large. Therefore, it appears that women are significantly underrepresented in positions of public leadership due to the existence of contradictory social perceptions (Hentschel et al., 2019). Understanding cultural dynamics is likely to lead to a balanced examination of the factors influencing women's leadership.

2.6.5 Self-Inflicted Barriers

Women have historically avoided leadership positions out of fear of being labelled as unfeminine, harsh, and insensitive to the needs of other women, resulting in low self-esteem (Herbst, 2020). Therefore, it is still uncommon to find many assertive women who have the fortitude to disregard this assessment (Herbst, 2020). Women's perceptions may be accurate or inaccurate, indicating that the immediate environment and circumstances have a significant impact on gender inequality. Gender stereotypes of women originate from their nurturing and compassionate characteristics, which portray them as feeble and incapable of assuming leadership positions.

Women frequently lack self-assurance and occasionally question their leadership skills, causing both male and female followers to rebel. Due to their lack of self-confidence, this undermines their leadership potential, women encounter obstacles (Kuruppuarachi, 2020). Women understand the expectations of patriarchal societies, which uphold cultural obstacles like the belief that women should be obedient to their husbands, who may become oppressive due to their privileges they receive. Work overload is regarded as an impediment to women executives assuming additional responsibilities at work. Women are also believed to create their own barriers by forming sub-par relationships with one another.

The 'queen bee syndrome' is an example of female leaders alienating their followers (Moriarty, 2019). Compared to men, women are more likely to harbour prejudices and biases against other women. When entrenched prejudices intersect with cultural doctrines and religious convictions, they erect formidable obstacles. These biases foster a pervasive atmosphere of mistrust toward women, a reality they keenly perceive, often leading them to seek solace in male validation (Ramnund-Mansing, 2023). Such gender-specific perceptions inevitably breed skepticism towards women's ability to lead, impeding their opportunities to assume leadership roles. Additionally, in order to avoid being labelled as unfeminine, women tend to respect cultural conformity. When women fail to control their emotions, they create additional barriers for themselves and attract conflict. Women are regarded as risk-averse and consequently react emotionally to unpredictable and authority-threatening situations. Therefore, women are distinguished by their desire to act ethically and avoid harming others.

2.6.6 Radical Women Gender Activism

Gender activists bravely address sensitive gender issues in public discourse, challenging entrenched patriarchal norms, though this can provoke hostility from those threatened by traditional power structures (Mohajan, 2022). Due to prejudice, influential women are frequently labelled as 'exceptional troublemakers' in contrast with the 'woman we know' attitude. To challenge this perception, women are strategically nominated to serve on boards and assume other influential positions, ostensibly aimed at shattering the glass ceiling. However, many aspiring female leaders hesitate to pursue such roles, perceiving them as merely symbolic and lacking real authority, consequently exacerbating the gender disparity. Gender activists bravely address sensitive gender issues in public discourse, challenging entrenched patriarchal norms, though this can provoke hostility from those threatened by traditional power structures (Mohajan, 2022). Due to prejudice, influential women are frequently labelled as 'exceptional troublemakers' in contrast with the 'woman we know' attitude. To challenge this perception, women are strategically nominated to serve on boards and assume other influential positions, ostensibly aimed at shattering the glass ceiling. However, many aspiring female leaders hesitate to pursue such roles, perceiving them as merely symbolic and lacking real authority, consequently exacerbating the gender disparity.

Utilising female-friendly institutions that aim for gender equality in recruitment and hiring, offering thorough evaluations focused on women's development and progression, and promoting inclusive leadership (Mwagiru, 2019). As a result, female leaders are negatively impacted by their female subordinates, while male subordinates receive promotion advice formulated by female leaders. Therefore, female employees tend to avoid female executives and prefer to be under the relationship of men in order to advance their careers (Rath, Mohanty & Pradhan, 2019). Despite the prevalence of women activists in fields concerned with gender inequality, these groupings do not appear to be field-specific. By organising women into distinct lobbying groups, specific messages can be articulated explicitly to influence their perspectives (Rath et al., 2019).

In this field, there is a dearth of diverse voices and perspectives because the groups tend to favour female activists. Men with significant conceptual and political backgrounds, as well as a variety of practitioners, may be advantageous to these groups (Storey, 2019). In order to strengthen their lobbying mechanisms, these organisations typically place a

heavy emphasis on transforming gender equality and justice processes. Despite isolated bureaucratic resistance, inequity between the sexes has proven to be insurmountable. Feminists are working towards social change by engaging in political advocacy and partnering with international research networks, policymakers and global activists (Storey, 2019).

These initiatives appear to establish partnerships with both local resources and a diverse group of contributors whose contributions enrich the message content. These initiatives emphasise work-life equilibrium, with a primary emphasis on role interchangeability. In addition, feminists would advocate for women's autonomous participation in large-scale decision-making, as opposed to their ceremonial role in cosmetics. The focus should be on collaborative work that is unbiased and non-discriminatory, with active male participation.

This is the basis of inclusive leadership, aiming to integrate the perspectives of all stakeholders, regardless of their biological or social orientation. However, activists and feminists are more likely to have an impact if their lobbying organisations consist of male and female members who express the same messages and act without bias (Thomas et al., 2019). If adopted this view will help to attain gender-inclusive leadership, equal female and male representation may be required at all these levels.

2.6.7 Metaphorical Barriers

Various metaphors are used by scholars to characterise the career obstacles women face in the workplace. Characterisation of women in literature by velvet ghettos, glass entrances, sticky floors, ivory cellars, glass ceilings, concrete ceilings, labyrinths, and glass cliffs still exists. The foundation of these barriers consists of stereotypes, visibility, legitimacy and authenticity doubts, and prejudices (Schaap & Shockley, 2020). Career barriers that impede women's organisational progression in the workplace are multifaceted and manifest in a variety of metaphorical ways (Barkuizen et al., 2022). For instance, the term 'glass ceiling' refers to invisible barriers that prevent women from obtaining senior leadership positions.

After many years of referring to the glass ceiling as a barrier faced exclusively by women, the term is now used to describe obstacles faced by individuals of diverse racial and

ethnic backgrounds who seek senior leadership positions (Roux, 2021). Similarly, African American women frequently confront a 'double glass ceiling', which refers to invisible barriers resulting from their dual racial and gender identities.

In addition to the glass ceiling being identified as a factor in the progression of women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds to leadership positions, the 'concrete ceiling' is a unique metaphor that describes barriers difficult to penetrate by African American women (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Shinbrot et al., 2019). The concrete ceiling represents a career-limiting factor that affects African Americans' ability to ascend the organisational ladder and coexist with others in the workplace. African American women are affected by the glass ceiling because they cannot envision themselves in leadership positions within their organisations (Schaap & Shockley, 2020).

The 'labyrinth' metaphor implies that women face obstacles throughout their careers, particularly from the time they begin devising their path to leadership until they reach their goal. A labyrinth metaphor suggests that advancing in one's career is a difficult but achievable endeavour (Rath et al., 2019). The labyrinth may have multiple practical routes to leadership, as the journey is illustrative of their efforts to comprehend and overcome roadblocks, obstacles, and dead ends encountered, as well as the challenging alternative routes to leadership.

Espi et al. (2019) posit that women can gain experience by deviating from a conventional, direct, and unbroken career path and by seizing opportunities and unanticipated approaches. If organisational leadership does not value this career path, however, highly qualified women would continue to be denied senior leadership positions (Schaap & Shockley, 2020). Some women are enabled by the labyrinth to attain senior leadership positions, but the labyrinth's walls remain intact, creating obstacles for other women who desire a similar path to leadership. As such, a labyrinth implies that women's leadership achievement exists between their abilities and aspirations and the challenges of their circumstances.

In advancing their professions, African American women face a variety of obstacles and challenges, regardless of the metaphor. Metaphorical gendered barriers have an impact on women's perceptions of professional obstacles in the workplace. As such, career challenges associated with gender categories tend to identify and categorise women

using metaphorical descriptors, which can lead to an objectionable view of women (Rath et al., 2019).

A sticky floor metaphor refers to career obstacles women face early in their careers that keep them employed and compensated at lower levels in organisations, including discriminatory practises, the lack of job flexibility, underpayment of wages, and the absence of career progression opportunities (Storey, 2019). A glass ceiling, on the other hand, is an invisible career barrier that prevents women from advancing to senior positions.

Women can be successful in a variety of positions throughout their careers due to the glass ceiling effect, but a translucent ceiling prevents them from ascending to higher levels (Babic & Hansez, 2021). This invisible ceiling impedes career progression and progression to senior-level positions. In contrast, obstacles aimed at ethnic women that impede progression opportunities for minority women are characterised by concrete ceilings.

2.7 MEASURES TO ADDRESS WOMEN'S PROGRESSION BARRIERS

Further investigation is needed to definitively establish the correlation between gender parity and the effectiveness of public enterprises. Research shows a strong link between women in leadership roles and a company's financial success. Businesses with more senior women executives tend to outperform those with fewer (McKinsey & Company, 2019). In addition, an overall gender-friendly organisational culture facilitates the development and progression of women within the workplace context (Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019). The researcher explores various methods in the subsequent sections, despite some cases where these tactics led to further challenges.

2.7.1 Capacity-Building Initiatives

Facilitating developmental networks for women helps them ascend the organisational ladder (Mehta, 2019; Stacho, Stachová & Raišienė, 2019). Businesses expanding globally require highly skilled workers to address talent shortages, leading to the need for specialised skill acquisition. Therefore, capacity-building initiatives provide a foundation for aligning and securing the development of qualified personnel (McKinsey & Company, 2019).

Furthermore, women have made greater educational gains than men in the majority of regions, with the former displaying high levels of education that represent a vastly underutilised economic development potential (McKinsey & Company, 2019). Further research is needed to establish if the potential of females can lead to enhanced workplace performance. In this context, removing barriers to women's leadership requires a well-structured and comprehensive capacity-development mechanism. The under-representation of women in leadership positions varies across different levels of organisational hierarchy. Enhancing women's education and supporting their progression into senior management roles can provide them with the necessary skills to take on leadership positions traditionally held by men (Mehta, 2019).

On the other hand, these programmes appear insufficient if they are not supplemented by other long-term mechanisms in order to be an effective tool for overcoming these obstacles. These should include mentoring programmes tailored to the leadership abilities of women. Mentors would be comprised of experienced and prominent senior staff members who provide career development and psychological support to women employees aspiring for leadership positions (Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019). The second argument proposes that employees with experienced mentors are likely to have increased job satisfaction, leading to higher commitment to their work and more chances for career progression. The concept suggests that contentment and commitment often lead to opportunities for progression.

Two distinct perceptions regarding objective (intrinsic) and subjective (extrinsic) mentoring functions contribute to satisfaction (Devicienti et al., 2019). Mentoring is an unpredictable tool for enhancing leadership that may require the implementation of various other strategies. Informal mentoring encounters that stem from spontaneous relationships built on sharing experiences between a mentee and mentor can be effective if executed thoughtfully (Brabazon & Schulz, 2020). Moreover, it would be peculiar to place a woman under the tutelage of a man, this would probably lead to shallow and unreliable disclosures to the opposite gender. This creates additional challenges in the absence of a significant number of female leaders who could serve as dependable mentors.

Senior female leaders may feel uneasy mentoring female subordinates due to concerns about losing their leadership position and risking their status (Devicienti et al., 2019). Mentoring and networking remains a potent force in accelerating leadership drive. These strategies can stimulate promotion opportunities more positively than performance and skill enhancement (Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019; Reichel, Lazarova, Apospori et al., 2022). The creation of an enabling environment provides women and females with educational opportunities, the freedom to think independently, and an ambiance devoid of stereotypes that encourages women to assume leadership positions (Fitong-Ketchiwou et al., 2022). Some organisations are contemplating the implementation of diversity programmes that promote workforce equality and extensive awareness in order to address the aforementioned problems (Reichel et al., 2022).

In most regions, inequality persists, and women are significantly underrepresented in public sector leadership positions (McKinsey & Company, 2019). Workplace diversity initiatives provide optimism for concerted efforts to pursue women's leadership trajectory despite the paucity of women in senior management positions in public enterprises (Rapuano, 2020). Creating inclusive societies and supporting women decreases inequality while also promoting economic and corporate expansion. Investing in women's education contributes significantly to economic development compared to solely focusing on gender parity.

Rath et al. (2019) argues that it is crucial and beneficial for businesses to leverage a pool of highly skilled women who are often overlooked and underused as talent becomes scarcer and the need for a qualified workforce increase. Women are the upcoming market that businesses need to include in their operations to understand. Having a gender-balanced management team can be advantageous for businesses and serve as a valuable national economic asset. Gender diversity programmes have become more common in the last ten years, but their effectiveness has been (Aiston & Fo, 2021; Hentschel et al., 2019). Nonetheless, some initiatives with interactive and participatory sessions presenting large-scale bias-reduction interventions demonstrated positive outcomes.

2.7.2 Accelerating Women's Access to Education

Open educational systems are gaining prominence as a result of the widespread digitalisation of the twenty-first century, which has led to an increase in the number of opportunities for acquiring knowledge that can be used to address a variety of societal challenges (Mayya, Martis, Ashok & Monteiro, 2021) Existing options for training include off-the-job training, live classroom lectures, videotapes, public seminars, online courses, group teleconferencing, and e-training. In addition, training encompasses on-the-job training such as job rotation, apprenticeships, mentoring, and counselling programmes (Manzi & Heilman, 2021; Mayya et al., 2021). Depending on the level of participant satisfaction and the transferability of degree material to the job, women in leadership positions have a variety of training options. Therefore, exhaustive evaluations of multiple training outcomes are to be considered for every training intervention. Prior to implementation, the efficacy of each training option has to be evaluated, with aspiring women leaders benefiting from training that is specifically designed for them (Alexander, 2019).

Women with an internal locus of control, high emotional intelligence, and high cognitive ability, for instance, are more likely to conceptualise more skills through diverse training interventions (Mayya et al., 2021). When training programmes include future female leaders, trainees are initiative-taking because the environment appears to be supportive. However, supervisor and team member support have a more significant effect on the transfer of acquired knowledge. Leadership changes necessitate organisations to have leadership succession planning to avoid unpleasant circumstances resulting from random selections. As a result of this realisation, women who aspire to ascend to leadership positions need to prepare themselves through various forms of training, including the ability to comprehend effective visioning coupled with skills in trust-building, mentoring, and situational analysis (Oosthuizen et al., 2019; Rapuano, 2020).

When women are trained as leaders through modelling exercises such as transformational leadership, it is evident that they are more likely to be effective leaders who improve performance (Oosthuizen et al., 2019). The numerous barriers that inhibit women from pursuing leadership education for various reasons has popularised open distance learning due to its accessibility and neutrality. Furthermore, globalisation and professional mobility necessitate adaptability to an environment that is erratic, uncertain,

complex, and ambiguous (Bosch, 2019). However, it is important to note that digital and open learning-sourced education present several challenges in the form of connectivity efficiency and, in the main, a lack of suitable infrastructure to support the system, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas of Sub-Saharan Africa (Alexander, 2019).

Notwithstanding the above-cited challenges, the capacity of Despite the challenges, the potential of the Open Distance Learning (ODL) method to fill the identified gaps stands as a promising means to augment the delivery of adaptable educational modalities, particularly beneficial for aspiring female leaders who often encounter barriers in accessing the requisite skill sets traditionally imparted by conventional universities and business schools (Mehta, 2019). to fill the identified void, would enhance the provision of a flexible form of education that could be used by aspiring female leaders who have been frequently prevented from acquiring the required skills offered by traditional universities and business schools (Mehta, 2019). Many universities recognise this demand. However insufficient research has been done on strategies that focus on aspiring female executives in public enterprises.

Mehta (2019) has noted that there is a rise in training institutions that support traditional universities by emphasising vocational education. This presence emphasises the importance of establishing partnerships and alliances between these institutions, universities, and public enterprises in order to collaboratively influence women's leadership and adapt to changing environmental demands (Gumede, 2020). This strategy tends to recommend a more targeted approach that implements a gender-inclusive leadership structure that is recognisable in the private and public sectors.

2.7.3 Women Management Training Programmes

Inferior professional and academic qualifications appear to be a barrier to women's progression in leadership positions (Nyoni & He, 2019). Leadership requires fundamental literacy, technical, interpersonal, critical thinking skills, as well as ethics training. This is now a worldwide issue, particularly prevalent in the least developed countries. (Alexander, 2019). It is unlikely to encountering more women with these skills is improbable, which calls for additional research into the competence level in this area.

Many companies provide technical skills and soft skills short courses, including management training programmes, to their employees. On the other hand, empowering women with these skills is poised to yield significant benefits, particularly for those aspiring to leadership positions. (Mehta, 2019). when organisations establish partnerships with educational institutions, they often collaborate to tailor course curricula that align with industry demands. Concurrently, organisations are embracing streamlined structures to enhance team engagement, dismantling conventional departmental silos, and nurturing robust team dynamics. Human resource managers are increasingly attuned to the impact of interpersonal behaviour in the workplace, prioritising concerns such as incivility, bullying, social exclusion, and reputational damage (Thomas et al., 2019).

In addition, it is imperative for any training intervention to include activities that refine logical reasoning, problem-definition skills, and the capacity to consider causality and thus determine alternative solutions. Problem-solving training has become a standard component of self-managed teams in the majority of organisations' quality-management training programmes (Mehta, 2019). Furthermore, it is vital to implement training in in ethics, particularly in developing nations. Ethics training has the effect of reinforcing organisational expectations by increasing the likelihood that employees will behave ethically. While organisations rely more on informal training, which is typically unstructured and tailored to specific situations and employees, there is more room for formal training, which is structured and includes more planned monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Vinnicombe & Mavin, 2023).

Informal and formal training are effective methods for enhancing workplace performance and are likely to equip women in becoming effective leaders. Both formal and informal training have the potential to disrupt work activities and result in financial losses if not properly planned. When a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis is conducted, these training interventions are essential and generate long-term returns. Training is a 'change agent' tool that primarily seeks to alter the workers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards improved performance (Mehta, 2019). Training facilitates the observation and evaluation of what needs to be modified and incorporated into the corporate culture of an organisation.

2.7.4 Role Models as a Learning Resource

By exposing women to female role models, the notion of women in leadership counteracts the negative effects of stereotypes (Koburtay et al., 2019). Nevertheless, extreme caution is required when identifying suitable and pertinent role models. It is essential, when contemplating role models, to acknowledge empirical studies demonstrating gender differences in leadership approaches, which paint a negative picture of the rationality of female role models. According to previous studies, role models can either inspire or injure others, necessitating vigilance in managing the diverse personalities of group members (Nyoni & He, 2019). As a result, citing accomplished female role models provides outstanding educational resources. Aspiring female leaders are likely to be intrigued by the biographies of well-known female leaders with admirable leadership qualities (Nyoni & He, 2019).

The attitudes and positions exhibited by society's leaders serve as examples. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions implies that there are few female role models, which hinders the ambitions of aspiring female leaders (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). However, the few existing female role models are likely to serve as a significant source of inspiration for other women. The perception that women leaders exhibit a degree of machismo diminishes their effectiveness as positive examples, despite the fact that role models are a potent tool for advancing women's leadership. Therefore, the evaluation of women's leadership in public organisations is a persistent endeavour.

Changes in the workplace that are primarily influenced by the technological revolution require new leadership strategies. Female leaders in the minority may struggle to find role models who demonstrate innovative leadership skills that are pertinent to the necessary technological expertise (Stewart, 2020). Therefore, training is essential to leverage past and present experiences. Therefore, it is beneficial to recognise senior female executives who exhibit strong performance capabilities and serve as role models for their subordinates.

Effective educational resources are required to advance the incorporation of informal skill transfer into practical learning experiences. One avenue for this integration is through networking and absorbing insights from experienced executives, as highlighted by

Mwashita et al. (2020). While leveraging role models holds promise for fostering growth, the scarcity of female role models in gender-focused fields limits this potential resource for women. Males enjoy a preponderant advantage and appear well-connected, which exacerbates the gender disparity in leadership representation.

2.7.5 Mentorship

Mentorship is one of the topics which has received significant scholarly interest in feminist literature throughout the past ten years, as it is recognised as a crucial facilitator of women's professional progress within the corporate setting. In its most comprehensive interpretation, mentorship encompasses a relational procedure according to which a mentor who has greater experience and expertise provides guidance to a mentee, who possesses lesser experience (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021). The availability of gender-specific guidance and assistance plays a crucial role in achieving effective leadership. In addition, the use of top leadership mentoring has been found to enhance the overall effectiveness of organisations (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021).

Mentorship plays a crucial role in supporting women in achieving a harmonious equilibrium between their professional and personal responsibilities (Ramohai, 2019). According to Mcilongo and Strydom (2021), mentorship has been identified as a helpful strategy for facilitating the career progression of women who have historically faced disadvantages in the South African public sector. The presence of a mentor can serve as a valuable means for women to cultivate their professional network and acquire the necessary competencies to adeptly establish connections in subsequent endeavours. Furthermore, a mentor facilitates the mentee's access to specialists with whom they may not have had prior connections.

Therefore, establishing rapport between the mentor and protégé can foster a positive relationship. The mentor's professional experiences can help the protégé overcome obstacles they may have encountered while endeavouring to navigate the ascent on their own (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). As such, and in the context of the study, the mentoring relationship is essential for women's career development. However, a negative mentor relationship can have a negative impact on one's career. In addition to assisting mentees in achieving career success, mentors can help others become aware of obstacles, identify

the issues that could prevent them from breaking the glass ceiling, and demonstrate leadership potential.

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter highlighted and outlined various scholarship perspectives regarding the progression or progression of women to senior leadership and management roles in order to resolve the underrepresentation of women, particularly in the public sector. Female leaders in the minority may struggle to find role models who demonstrate innovative leadership skills that are pertinent to the necessary technological expertise (Stewart, 2020). Therefore, training is essential to leverage past and present experiences. Therefore, it is beneficial to recognise senior female executives who exhibit strong performance capabilities and serve as role models for their subordinates.

Effective educational resources are required to advance the incorporation of informal skill transfer into practical learning experiences. One avenue for this integration is through networking and absorbing insights from experienced executives, as highlighted by Mwashita et al. (2020). While leveraging role models holds promise for fostering growth, the scarcity of female role models in gender-focused fields limits this potential resource for women.

This chapter has examined a range of literature, existing data from studies, and academic viewpoints regarding the concepts addressed. The literature in this chapter acts as the study's cornerstone, offering further understanding of the concepts and terminology relevant to the study's topic. The upcoming chapter on research methodology will elucidate the study's execution, including the methods, instruments, and participants involved.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter basically elucidates the overall research methodology outlined in Section 1.7 of Chapter 1. Accordingly, the current chapter elaborates on the guiding principles, processes, and procedures that were implemented or adopted to actualise both the theoretical/ abstract and practical/ empirical aspects of the research topic. In that regard, this chapter commences with an outline of the research philosophy (worldview, paradigm or perspective); the research design and methodology, as well as the research approach and research strategy. The chapter then proceeds with the population and sampling framework; the data collection processes and data analysis procedures; as well as the trustworthiness issues and ethical considerations.

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHICAL PARADIGM

The research philosophical paradigm (worldview or perspective) refers to a set of beliefs, scientific principles, abstract ideas, and assumptions that inform the basis for our view of reality concerning the world and the people in it (Ansari et al., 2022; Durdella, 2019). On the other hand, a paradigm can be broadly described as a collection of values and perspectives shared by scientists, a set of principles, agreements and protocols about how problems are to be understood, how we view the world and conduct research (Chauvet, 2020). According to Mohajan (2020), a research paradigm could be viewed fundamentally as the philosophical viewpoints or principles that provide guidance for the process of data collection and analysis throughout the research process.

In the view of Neuman (2020), a paradigm is developed and informed on the basis of several assumptions, including ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions. Ontological assumptions are premised on the nature of truth-reality, and epistemological assumptions are based on understanding and knowledge; while axiological assumptions are concerned with the ethics of research; and methodological assumptions premise on the nature and range of research methods used to gather and analyse data. Based on these assumptions, research paradigms are then adopted by various researchers, depending on their perspectives, paradigms and worldviews about the reality of nature, truth, knowledge, and the world (Leavy, 2022).

3.2.1 Adoption and Relevance of Interpretivism

There are several commonly known research paradigms (perspectives or worldviews) which guide the conduct of empirical investigation, namely, positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, critical realism, and post-modernism, among others (Leavy, 2022; Saunders et al., 2019). The current study was underpinned by interpretivism, which is a philosophical foundation of qualitative research (Hayashi et al., 2019). Interpretivism is an aspect of the broader constructivist perspective, which entails the construction and development of knowledge (epistemology) in the ecological surroundings (naturalistic environment) according to the lived experiences and interpretation or perspectives of those who have first-hand knowledge on the basis of their cultural (phenomenological) background Hayashi et al., 2019; Mohajan, 2022). Moreover, interpretivism is more aligned to qualitative research techniques and focus is more on the participants' personal experiences and construction of social reality (Leavy, 2022).

This study employs a phenomenological paradigm because its assumptions are consistent with the study's methodology, data acquisition methods, and data analysis techniques. Similar to other paradigms, the phenomenological paradigm consists of several interrelated assumptions, namely: the philosophical assumptions about the nature of the truth or reality about a phenomenon (ontology), the researchers' position or stance with regard to understanding the truth or reality of that phenomenon (epistemology), and the ethical values (axiology) to which researchers may attach or react to the entire research process and the phenomenon under study (Neuman, 2020).

Varpio et al. (2020) inform that the interpretivist ontology asserts the existence of different realities that are formed through social processes. As a result, the concept of truth and reality is posited as a product of human construction rather than an inherent discovery. In that regard, the study adopted and applied the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework and utilised an interpretive phenomenological approach to conduct the current study (Smith & Nizza, 2022). The IPA perspective posits that knowledge and meaning are formed by the dynamic interplay between individuals and their surrounding environment, hence reflecting an epistemological standpoint. The ontology of IPA centres on the participants' perception and understanding of the world (Smith & Nizza, 2022). The examination of the fundamental nature of individuals' experiences holds significant importance.

This approach serves as a mechanism for elucidating the authentic significance of a phenomenon through engaging with those who have experienced it. Furthermore, the study adopted a qualitative technique rooted in the theoretical frameworks of constructivism and phenomenology. Interpretivism is more congruent with qualitative research methodologies. The primary focus of the study was placed on the individual experiences recounted by the participants. Interpretivism is rooted in the belief that reality is formed through social processes.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Research design serves as a comprehensive framework for a study since it delineates key elements such as the participants, subject matter, research site, and duration (Ansari et al., 2022). A study design also offers a set of guidelines and strategies to which the researcher adheres for guidance on completion of the study. The selection of a study design serves as a guiding framework for researchers in determining their strategy to data gathering and analysis. The researcher adopted a phenomenological design, especially an interpretive phenomenological analysis research design (IPA) (Gyollai, 2020), in order to gain insight and explore the subjective experiences of academic personnel. The IPA is expected to facilitate the researcher's exploration of the personal narratives of women employed in open distance learning institutions.

The utilisation of the IPA methodology facilitated the examination of the personal narratives of female individuals working at open distance learning institutions. The present study utilised phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideographs as methodological approaches, which entail comprehensive investigations into the subjective experiences of individuals, their interpretations of these experiences, and the inferences drawn by the researcher based on the participant's' interpretations (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). The utilisation of IPA allows for the accurate representation of the narratives of several individuals. As the participants strive to comprehend and interpret their experiences, the researcher strives to obtain insight into the participants' cognitive processes involved in sense-making.

The IPA posits that knowledge and meaning are generated through the dynamic interaction between humans and their environmental contexts (Gyollai, 2020). On a metaphysical level, the IPA is concerned with the manner in which participants engage

with issues. Therefore, the IPA is crucial in analysing the fundamental and genuine implications of a phenomenon from the viewpoint of those who possess first-hand knowledge of the very phenomenon. Additionally, the utilisation of the IPA allows for the accurate representation of numerous individuals' narratives. As the participants strive to comprehend and interpret their experiences, the researcher strives to obtain insight into the participants' cognitive processes involved in sense-making (Tardy, 2019; Varpio et al., 2020).

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study adopted a qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis approach to investigate the progression of women in senior leadership and management roles within the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) higher education sector in South Africa. This approach was deemed appropriate due to its capacity to facilitate the acquisition of data that enables the researcher to gain an understanding of the emotions, perspectives, and experiences of the participants from their own perspectives and in their own words (Patel & Patel, 2019). Furthermore, this single-method research design approach is consistent with qualitative data-generation methodologies and open-ended interviews for collecting data (Johnson et al., 2020; Polonsky & Waller, 2019).

In order to gain insight and explore the first-hand experiences of women in managerial positions within an OdeL institution, a qualitative research methodology was utilised. The researcher used a qualitative approach grounded in phenomenology. The qualitative approach is shaped by the interpretivist ideology and utilises methodologies that facilitate the researcher's comprehensive understanding of the intricate connections between individuals and their surroundings, as well as the contributions individuals make to the construction of the social fabric in which they are embedded (Hesselink, 2021). The qualitative approach is linked to the existence of numerous realities as generalisations are derived from or focused on the viewpoint of the participants, which is also susceptible to diverse social influences (Durdella, 2019).

In contrast with quantitative methodologies, qualitative research places its primary emphasis on the exploration and comprehension of an individual's subjective thoughts, experiences, feelings/ emotions, and perceptions as they interpret and construct their surrounding or social realities (Blog, 2019). The researcher implemented the IPA due to

its capacity to facilitate the participants' or academic personnel's own understanding and meaning they attach to work-based experiences concerning the progression or progression or progression of women in senior management or leadership positions or roles (Smith & Nizza, 2022). In that regard, the utilisation of the IPA methodology facilitated the examination of the personal narratives of female individuals engaged in work inside open distance learning institutions.

The extent of the present study's adoption of the IPA further entails the utilisation of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideographs as methodological approaches, which entail comprehensive investigations into the subjective experiences of individuals, their interpretations of these experiences, and the inferences drawn by the researcher based on the participants' interpretations (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Furthermore, the present study applied an inductive technique, as it involves the construction of theories or generalisations based on the examination of data obtained from observations and measurements (Hesselink, 2021; Smith & Nizza, 2022). The research design implemented in this study was cross-sectional to the extent that it involved the collection of data from a specific research environment throughout a certain period of time and participants' availability (Hesselink, 2021; Polonsky & Waller, 2019).

As individuals strive to comprehend their experiences, the researcher attempts to comprehend the manner in which individuals are comprehending their experiences. The incorporation of double hermeneutic meaning amplifies the descriptive and interpretative characteristics of IPA. Therefore, the utilisation of the IPA methodology was deemed appropriate for this study endeavour, as it enabled the researcher to thoroughly examine and assess the lived experiences of individuals involved in higher education establishments.

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The study population is defined as a comprehensive group of individuals, objects or units that are the fundamental focus of a study on account of the major reference points they have concerning certain critical aspects of that study (Chauvet, 2020; Gyollai, 2020). Furthermore, the term, 'population' refers to the complete assemblage of individuals that are of relevance to the researcher, and against whom the outcomes of the research can be extrapolated (Neuman 2020).

The population of this study comprised exclusively of female individuals who were engaged in the process of progression or progression within the ODeL institution being investigated. The individuals chosen for this study were drawn from several tiers of senior management, middle management, operational and supervisory positions. In particular, the study targeted the women who have transitioned from supervisory management roles to middle management positions within the ODeL institution being investigated. The study comprises exclusively of female participants. Accordingly, the sample size of this study consisted of 25 women in the middle-management positions.

3.5.1 Research Settings

The study was conducted at the Sunnyside and Muckleunek campuses of the ODeL organisation being studied in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The educational institution provides a range of academic programmes at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The institution is also bound by the regulations outlined in the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) and functions as the designated social and political context for the study.

3.5.2 Units of Analysis

The concept, 'unit of analysis' refers to the fundamental essence of the entity under investigation, and serves as a standard for evaluating and contrasting various entities entailed within a study or research (Damsa & Jornet, 2020). The concept under consideration possesses the ability to manifest many characteristics or attributes, thereby assisting a researcher to establish the boundaries for investigation and establishing connections within those boundaries (Damsa & Jornet, 2020). The units of analysis encompass several items, including individuals, groups of people, objects, geographic entities, and social artefacts.

In this regard, this study aims at identifying the female employees occupying positions in the top senior, and middle management tiers at the Sunnyside and Muckleunek campuses of the ODeL organisation. The inclusion of the identified participants in the study contributed a pivotal role in providing valuable insights on the trajectory of women's progression to senior management roles.

3.5.3 Sampling Method

Sampling involves the deliberate selection of a subset from a larger population with the intention of accurately representing the entire population (Neuendorf, 2019). A subset or sample refers to a smaller, representative subset of the larger population under study (Neuendorf, 2019). In a broad sense, a sample might be conceptualised as a cohort of individuals chosen from a more extensive populace. The degree of representativeness is a confirmation of the difficulty or impracticality of involving all population members in the study due to logistical, costs, and other related factors (Chauvet, 2020). Given the challenge of establishing a comprehensive sampling frame for this particular investigation, the decision was made by the researcher to apply the non-probability purposive sampling strategy as the preferred method of selecting participants for involvement in this study.

Non-probability sampling is implemented in situations where it is not feasible to establish a sampling frame, which makes it difficult to identify an appropriate sample size relative to the population (Johnson et al., 2020). The researcher implemented the purposive or judgemental sampling technique to choose the sample of 25 women occupying various managerial, operational, and supervisory positions at the Gauteng Province ODeL institution under review. These women were selected among employees working at the Sunnyside and Muckleneuk campuses of the institution. The present study used purposeful sampling as a methodological approach, as it allowed the researcher to intentionally select participants who held managerial roles and responsibilities. Consequently, this approach facilitated the exclusion of women who did not occupy positions in management.

3.5.4 Sampling Criteria

The sampling criteria refers to the standard or considerations according to which the researcher establishes or determines the eligibility of those who could participate in the study, as well as the ineligibility of those who were not selected for participation in the study (Flick, 2020; Kumar, 2020).

3.5.4.1 Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria specifically relate to the standard or considerations according to which the researcher establishes or determines the eligibility of those who could participate in the study on account of their homogenous attributes or qualities compared to the greater population (Flick, 2020) In order to establish sample homogeneity or similarity, the inclusion criteria encompassed individuals who were permanent academics of all races, possessing a minimum of five years of professional experience, and employed at a Higher Education Institution (HEI). The individuals involved in this study were aged between18 and 65 years.

3.5.4.2 Exclusion criteria

The exclusion criteria refer to the standard or considerations according to which the researcher establishes or determines the ineligibility of those who were not selected for participation in the study (Kumar, 2020). Accordingly, excluded in the study were those individuals who did not hold academic positions and had less than five years of work experience at the Sunnyside and Muckleunek campuses of the ODeL organisation being studied. In addition, the exclusions also applied to those individuals who were in part-time academic employment, as well as those who were below the age of 18 or above 65 years in age.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

According to Durdella (2019), data collection is a systematic and meticulous procedure implemented to gather essential and relevant information for the purpose of conducting the study. Furthermore, data collection fulfils certain objectives and inquiries in a research study. It is imperative for the data collection methods to be characterised by logic, conciseness, and efficiency in order to obtain comprehensive and first-hand accounts of experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation (Durdella, 2019).

The researcher personally collected primary data through semi-structured interviews which were conducted with all interviewees. The researcher utilised a semi-structured interview format which enabled the interviewer to pose questions in a non-linear manner which is autonomous, granting the interviewees to respond to the questions in their own unique manner. This approach facilitated the introduction of novel and pertinent information that might not have been explicitly solicited (Billups, 2021). Additionally, the researcher explained to the participants that they had the right to confirm, withdraw, and modify their preceding answers during the interview. This aspect was of utmost importance as it allowed the participants to offer a more thorough responses subsequent to a brief contemplation of the given answer (Neuendorf, 2019).

The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews that were in accordance with a pre-established interview plan. All interviews with participants were performed using the Microsoft Teams platform. In addition, all interviews were allocated a duration of 60 minutes and conducted at prearranged time intervals to facilitate participants in expressing their viewpoints without constraints and with limited disruptions. Furthermore, the researcher used Microsoft Teams application to facilitate the process of recording and transcribing participant interactions and interview sessions in a simultaneous manner.

3.6.1 Interview guide

In this study, data collection involved the utilisation of semi-structured interviews, which is executed to acquire information from the participants. The interviewees were specifically encouraged to provide insights that might typically be difficult to obtain through a structured interview format. In order to adhere to the principles of interpretivism, the researcher used a semi-structured interview technique in line with De Jonckheere and Vaughn (2019) and Patel and Patel (2019). The semi-structured interview is a data collection technique that involves posing questions, centred on specific themes or issues that require attention. This approach offers the advantage of flexibility, as it permits the reordering or exclusion of certain questions as deemed necessary.

The semi-structured interview schedule comprises of a concise compilation of questions and themes that are implemented by the researcher to facilitate the conversation and guarantee comprehensive coverage of all relevant subjects (refer to Appendix F). The methodology utilised in this study involves using a standardised interview format which

consists of well-structured queries, allowing for open-ended responses. By conducting semi-structured interviews with a sample size of 25 participants (n=25, 100%), the researcher successfully gathered data that facilitated a comprehensive comprehension of the experiences of women.

Additionally, the data collected reached a threshold of saturation, indicating that further interviews would not yield substantially new information. Maintaining a record of inquiries relevant to a particular research query is crucial to facilitate a seamless and authentic execution of the interview. It is important for the researcher to formulate questions and themes in accordance with the theoretical framework presented in the existing literature in order to establish the credibility and dependability of the semi-structured interview schedule in line with the suggestions made by Leavy (2022).

It is important for a pilot interview to be conducted in order to ensure the validity of the themes to be addressed, the duration of the interview, the coherence of the conversation, and the methodology for capturing and documenting data in line with Mavodza (2020). The validation of the interview framework is based on a single interview, which is not included in the final analysis of the study. In the same vein, the validity of the study pertains to the degree of correspondence between the research inquiries and the data obtained from the interview queries, in line with Hayashi et al., (2019) & Neuendorf, (2019).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis pertains to the systematic organisation, processing, and categorisation of raw data for conversion into meaningful evidence or findings of the study (Mavodza, 2020; Silverman, 2020). This study utilised thematic data analysis techniques to analyse the interview data obtained from the participants' interview-based responses or statements in line with suggestions made by Braun & Clarke (2019). The procedure of conducting a thematic analysis involves the coding of interview transcripts and the subsequent synthesis of these codes to discover recurring themes through a method of inductive coding.

In this regard, the technique of inductive coding involves the construction of codes derived from acquired data, rather than the development of codes based on pre-existing theory (Jones, 2020). A theme could be defined as repetitive statements or responses that

emerge from a discernible pattern of answers and encompasses the fundamental aspects pertaining to the study inquiries (Jones, 2020). In this regard, the researcher used an inductive approach to data analysis, according to which she derived the main or global themes from the data she collected through the interviews/ conversations with participants. Table 3.1 overleaf is an illustration of the different stages or steps of the data analysis process.

Table 3.1: Different analysis of transcripts in several stages:

Analysis Steps	Related Activities
Step 1	During the reading and re-reading phase, the researcher engaged in the transcription of data, carefully examined the data multiple times, and recorded any preliminary reflections. Prior to continuing, the researcher acquainted herself with all accessible data. The researcher engaged in the practise of note-taking and recorded their preliminary thoughts (Smith & Eatough, 2019).
Step 2:	In this phase, the researcher systematically and meaningfully arranged the data. The process of note-taking results in a comprehensive compilation of notes and annotations (Smith & Eatough, 2019). The utilisation of a theoretical thematic analysis was chosen by the researcher due to the unique research problems being addressed, as opposed to an inductive approach. The researcher used a systematic coding process to identify and analyse interesting data characteristics throughout the full dataset. Subsequently, the researcher collated relevant data corresponding to each code. Braun and Clarke (2019) describe the codes as fundamental components of analysis. The coding methodology involved the identification and categorisation of word or phrase clusters that accurately represented and provided a description of the observed phenomenon. The researcher implemented open coding, a method in which predetermined codes were not used. Instead, the codes were produced and adjusted as the researcher progressed through the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2019).
Step 3:	The researcher systematically generated emergent themes by aggregating relevant data for each prospective theme through the process of code compilation. The predominant focus of this study revolved around descriptive themes, which involved the depiction of patterns observed in the data that were relevant to the research inquiry. The transcribed data yielded initial themes, which were further organised into a cohesive framework that effectively communicates the overall narrative of the data (Peart et al., 2020).
Step 4:	The process involved in this study entailed an exploration of the interconnections between emergent themes.

Analysis Steps	Related Activities
	A critical evaluation was conducted to ascertain the extent to which these themes effectively align with the research objectives.
	The compatibility between the themes and the coded extracts, as well as the full data set, was assessed by the researcher.
	Subsequently, the themes were established and assigned appropriate labels.
	In this phase, the researcher assessed the congruence between the identified themes and the coded excerpts as well as the entirety of the collected data, resulting in the development of a thematic map.
	The implementation of this particular measure was deemed essential in order to ensure the overall quality of the process (Jones, 2020).
Step 5	**Moving to the next case**: The ultimate refinement of the themes was the identification of the fundamental nature of each subject.
	Therefore, the continued study aimed to enhance the specificity of each theme and the overall narrative it conveys.
	This process involved developing precise definitions and labels for each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2019).
Step 6	**Looking for patterns across cases**: The cases were analysed in order to identify any discernible patterns.
	The patterns of shared higher-order traits across cases were recognised by the researcher, along with the inclusion of idiosyncratic examples (Braun & Clarke, 2019).
Step 7:	**Taking interpretations to deeper levels**: The researcher used the IPA approach.
	The primary aim of the IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) was to examine the process by which individuals actively generate personal meaning within the context of their lives.
	As a result, the researcher tried to gain an understanding of the participant's perspective on the experience, while also formulating insightful questions pertaining to the material presented.
	The utilisation of this particular methodology had a crucial role in elucidating and delimiting the experiential truths of women occupying leadership roles inside institutions of higher education.
	The current section presents the themes that emerge from the classified data and the arguments put forth by the researcher.
	The researchers meticulously examined the audio recordings and cross-referenced them with the corresponding transcripts to ensure the inclusion of every recorded interview (Howitt, 2019; Peart et al., 2020).

3.8 ENSURING RIGOUR AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

The concept of rigour in research refers to the degree of trustworthiness and credibility of the study's processes and consequent findings (Silverman, 2020; Tight, 2019). Such rigour and trustworthiness is achieved by utilising various strategies such as triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, thick and rich description, audit trail, and

member checks. These strategies are used to uphold the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, authenticity, and conformability (Tracy, 2020). Furthermore, implementation of the IPA enabled the study's focus on establishing robust methods that allowed for thorough authentication of the collected data and subsequent findings.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is defined as the degree to which the study findings align with the actual state of affairs or reality of the phenomenon being explored (Neuman, 2020). In the context of this study, credibility refers to the extent to which the findings generated by the participants could be considered dependable and trustworthy. The assessment of credibility in qualitative research is not contingent upon the participants' numbers, but rather hinges upon the calibre of the gathered data. The establishment of the finding'' credibility was attained through the usage of interviews with individuals occupying managerial roles (Cizek, 2020).

Credibility was ensured in this study by means of the uniformisation of the interview questions for all participants. In each interview session, all the research participants were asked the same questions as appearing in the interview guide (see Appendix E). In this regard, the findings are premised on a credible standard or criteria since there was no divergence from the originally stated interview questions that were also aligned to the research objectives as stated in Section 1.5.

3.8.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the probability of achieving consistent outcomes when replicating identical research (Howitt, 2019). However, scholars have contended that within the context of qualitative research studies, dependability pertains to the extent to which the findings align with the gathered data, rather than the degree of replicability of those findings (Neuendorf, 2019). Furthermore, the reliability of a research endeavour is contingent upon the ability of other researchers to repeat the judgements taken by the original researcher, implying that the reporting process is characterised by transparency, logic, and traceability (Polonsky & Waller, 2019).

Accordingly, the dependability of the study was ensured by means of an audit trail to systematically document and delineate the process by which data was gathered, encompassing every phase of the investigation and the decisions that informed or influenced these processes (Howitt, 2019). This step of the audit trail is deemed appropriate since it serves as a record of the study for other researchers to envision the repeatability of the current findings in their own studies that investigate similar problems of the current study (Swart et al., 2019).

3.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is a crucial aspect in research, as it explains the degree to which the findings can be corroborated by other scholars in the same subject, hence mitigating any biases (Swart et al., 2019). The credibility of the study results was ensured by means of member checking, with the participants provided an opportunity to review the preliminary research report prior to their dissemination in the form of the researcher's completed dissertation (Polit & Beck, 2021). Additionally, the researcher regularly consulted with her supervisor to ensure that the final research instrument was feasible, and that it also addressed the intentions of the study. In addition to the regular cross-referencing of the findings with the primary data sources, the researcher also consulted with a professional HR practitioner to check the degree to which the findings were consistent with reality (Swart et al., 2019).

3.8.4 Transferability

Transferability refers to the researcher's endeavour to offer adequate contextual details regarding their study, enabling readers and interested researchers to adapt the findings to their own specific circumstances (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The concept of transferability also refers to the ability to apply the findings of a particular research study to different research contexts or situations (Taherdoorst, 2020). The researcher elaborately explained the context, results, and individuals involved in the study (Cizek, 2020). Additionally, the study provided a detailed explication of the data collection environment.

In the above regard, the researcher utilised comprehensive and detailed explanations of the methodology, setting, results, and analytical processes (Taherdoorst, 2020). The usage of such descriptions serves to immerse readers within the depicted scenario of

fostering a shared feeling of experiential engagement. Moreover, the researcher adequately described the reader's assessment, analysis, and understanding of the potential applicability of the findings to their specific circumstances. The study further provided detailed descriptions of the participants' demographic profiles, as well as their respective experiences as captured in their verbatim statements.

3.8.5 Authenticity

The concept of authenticity has a significant impact on the lived experiences and cultural dynamics of individuals involved. To that effect, Polit and Beck (2021) indicates that authenticity refers to the extent to which the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation accurately represent the experiences being studied and are portrayed in diverse manners. In this study, the researcher chose participants whose inclusion subscribed to their accumulation of an unbroken employment record of over five (5) years at the selected ODeL institution of higher learning. The researcher selected these participants in order to obtain detailed information based on their service records, experiences and other inclusion considerations mentioned in Section 3.5.4. Furthermore, the researcher used audio-recording to capture the participants' narratives, which were then transcribed verbatim.

The study's authenticity is assessed by the careful selection of suitable data and the supply of detailed and comprehensive descriptions. Accordingly, the transcriptions were subjected to a thorough analysis, aiming at providing a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. Taherdoorst (2020) mentions that the utilisation of textual content to depict events might facilitate the reader's ability to connect with the prevailing atmosphere, language, and even emotions of the described situation. The researcher rendered the participants' transcripts and experiences accessible for the purpose of verification, and the study's report underwent plagiarism screening using the Turnitin software (Taherdoorst, 2020).

3.9 RESEARCH ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations and aspects in research pertain to a system of moral values concerned with the extent to which research protocols and treatment of the research subjects adhere to professional and legal codes of conduct and obligations, as well as socially acceptable norms and practices (Alderson & Morrow, 2020; Cilliera & Viljoen,

2021). In the view of Salkind (2022), ethical problems mostly emerge due to the involvement of human subjects, animals, and organisations that own rights that should not be infringed upon. As such, the researcher strictly upheld the required professional and scientific standards of ethical conduct throughout the study's entire duration. In that context, the researcher took measures to ensure the well-being of the participants' bodily, mental, and emotional well-being in order to minimise any potential harm to them.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher followed the following established ethical guidelines and protocols: adherence to the internal institutional reviews; informed consent and voluntary participation; confidentiality and anonymity; autonomy; as well as upholding the scientific integrity of the research.

3.9.1 Adherence to the Internal Institutional Reviews

Before collecting data, the researcher received approval from the Department of Human Resource Management Research, Ethics Innovation Committee (DREC) and the Research Permission Sub-Committee of the Senate Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees, and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) to conduct this study (see Appendix A). Following the acquisition of ethical approval, the researchers proceeded to request permission from the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) in order to conduct the study.

3.9.1.1 Protecting the rights of the institutions involved

The study was conducted at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) and involved the faculty members of the institution. The researcher received authorisation and approval to conduct this study from the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) and the Research Permission Sub-Committee (RPSC) of the institution (refer to Annexure A). The primary responsibility of these committees is to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of any research conducted inside higher education institutions that involves the use of personal information and/or human subjects as participants.

Furthermore, these committees bear the obligation of scrutinising ethical dimensions pertaining to research, with a specific focus on ensuring the preservation of the dignity, rights, integrity, and welfare of the individuals participating in the study sample (Cilliers & Viljoen, 2021; Kate & Whitley, 2018). Both committees expressed their satisfaction with

the researcher's commitment to adhere to the rules outlined in the institution's Policy on Research Ethics.

3.9.2 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

The concept of informed consent necessitates that individuals participating in research make a conscious and free choice to engage in the study, having been adequately informed by the researcher about the nature of the research and the potential consequences of their participation (Blog, 2019).

The data collection began after participants indicated their intention to participate in the study only after the researcher's full disclosure of the purposes of the study. After agreeing to the conditions of participation in the study, all participants signed consent forms as an indication of their full understanding and agreement. Furthermore, all participants received assurances that the data they provided would be secure and only the researcher would have access to it. The participants were duly apprised of their rights by the researcher, who also emphasised that they were at liberty to express themselves without fear of any adverse consequences (Cizek, 2020).

The request to conduct the study at the selected Gauteng Province ODeL institution was successfully approved, as evidenced in Appendix D. Following the acquisition of approval from the OdeL management team, the study was conducted by a designated employee from the Human Resources Department, who serves as the gatekeeper, along with a staff member from the Directorate who possesses the necessary authorisation. The Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) were used to obtain employee access for the purpose of retrieving a comprehensive dataset encompassing staff names, contact information, qualifications, and professional experiences. To ensure the protection of participants' privacy, the gatekeeper assumes the responsibility of transmitting informational letters or emails on behalf of the researcher.

In order to adhere to the provisions outlined in the Protection of Personal Information Act/ POPIA (No. 4 of 2013), the information obtained from the gatekeeper was managed in a manner that ensured confidentiality and anonymity. Subsequently, the researcher proceeded to choose prospective volunteers from the compiled roster and requested them to express their consent to partake in the study. The letter included a thorough overview of the study, encompassing its goal, aims, advantages, and the rights of

participants. Once participants express their desire to partake, the scheduling of interview sessions is organised, including the day, time, and venue. The researcher initiated electronic correspondence with all female individuals occupying high-ranking managerial roles within the available population.

This group encompassed both academic and administrative personnel affiliated with the Sunnyside and Muckleneuk campuses. The electronic correspondence had two appended documents, namely a single page comprising informational content, as well as a letter that extended an invitation to the recipients, urging them to indicate their inclination to partake in the research endeavour. The participants were provided with the informed consent form (Appendix C) in advance of the scheduled interview. Before the interviews commenced, the researcher provided a comprehensive explanation of the topics encompassed within the consent form and offered reassurance regarding the confidentiality of the participants' information. In order to preserve the privacy of the participants, their identities were substituted by numerical identifiers in the report.

The data collected from these individuals is constrained to their roles as female managers and their individual encounters. Participants took part in the research study voluntarily, and not mandatorily. Prior to engaging in the interviews, it was necessary for individuals to have obtained consent and demonstrated their readiness to participate (Silverman, 2020). Prior to commencing the interviews, the researcher provided a comprehensive explanation of the study to the participants. In order to mitigate the potential for confusion and uncertainty, all participants were provided with a leaflet that pertained to the study.

The document encompassed the study's purpose, objectives, benefits, and relevance, and participants were invited to peruse its contents. In the event that individuals express their readiness to partake, it is obligatory for them to furnish documented informed consent. The researcher provided assurance to all participants that their anonymity and confidentiality would be upheld during the entirety of the interview procedure. Upon carefully reviewing and providing their signature on a consent form, the participants were exclusively subjected to questioning.

3.9.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity,

The researcher assured all the study participants that every effort would be made to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The principle of confidentiality

is maintained by ensuring that any information gathered from the respective participant is managed with the highest level of privacy (Salkind, 2022). The publication of any private data that could identify the participants is contingent upon obtaining explicit consent from these people. In order to uphold confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher apprised participants that the obtained data would be kept undisclosed to the general public and would not be disseminated to external entities not directly associated with the study.

The gathered data was securely stored within a computer system that required a password for access. Equally crucial is the preservation of anonymity. The researcher anonymised all the participants by identifying them through pseudonyms (Salkind, 2022). All identifiable information, including specific ages, places, true names, and job positions, was anonymised, substituted, or omitted. The initial transcriptions and anonymised data were securely saved in a password-protected manner (Flick, 2020).

3.9.4 Autonomy

The principle of autonomy entails that participants are adults who are capable of making their own independent decisions and choices without any undue external influence (Kumar, 2020). The researcher ensured that subjects were not subjected to any form of coercion in their participation in the study. In that regard, the participants were entitled to ask questions of their own during the interviews, as well as withdrawing from the research at any point without any possibility of facing any adverse consequences (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Based on the voluntary nature of their participation, the participants had the option to choose not to reply to any, or all of the questions. The participants were duly notified by the researcher that the interviews would be audio-recorded prior to the interview sessions, and they were granted full autonomy to refuse for their voices to be captured on audio (Kumar, 2020).

3.9.5 Upholding the Scientific Integrity of the Research

The quality of a study is contingent on the researcher's expertise, experience, integrity, and commitment to fairness (Cizek, 2020). Furthermore, it is essential to maintain integrity throughout all phases of a study, including the formulation and clarification of the research topic, design and access acquisition, as well as the collection, processing, storage, analysis, and reporting of findings. As such, the researcher diligently adhered to the ethical principles outlined in this study, ensuring that the sources were accurately

cited and duly acknowledged. The findings were carefully documented, and no instances of data misrepresentation prevailed.

The researcher upheld the ethical guidelines throughout the study, which included the avoidance of any potential harm to participants, the voluntary nature of their participation, the preservation of anonymity and confidentiality, accountability in the analysis and reporting of findings, and compliance with data management protocols (Hesselink, 2021). Moreover, consultation was sought at each stage with the relevant stakeholders.

3.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology and the theoretical premises that guided the study as a whole in order to address the main problem and objectives of the study. The study adopted a qualitative and interpretative phenomenological analysis approach to investigate the progression of women in leadership and management roles in the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) higher education sector in South Africa. Accordingly, the chapter provided an overview of the research design, sample strategies, as well as the data collection and data analysis procedures implemented in the study.

The chapter also provided details of the measures or criteria by means of which the scientific rigour and trustworthiness of the research process and its findings were established. In addition, the chapter concluded with the applicable ethical considerations that were implemented in this study. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this chapter is to present the qualitative findings obtained through the individual interviews that were held with the chosen research participants. The findings themselves serve as the seminal base against which efficacy of the study and its objectives could be determined (Leavy, 2022; Mavodza, 2020). In the context of the study, therefore, the research objectives and research questions outlined respectively in Section 1.5.2 and Section 1.5.3 of Chapter 1 are the most foundational means to determine the significance of the research findings.

Furthermore, the current chapter provides the indispensable and crucial participant or main stakeholder perspectives concerning the inherent power structures that impede the progression or progression of women to senior management positions in institutions of higher education. As such, the participants' profiles or demographics are summarised, followed by the thematic development of the findings developed from the analysed interview-based transcripts (Mohajan, 2020; Neuendorf, 2019).

It was essential to establish and maintain coherence between the research questions and the pertinent literature by matching the interview questions to the research questions. Furthermore, comparisons were made between the findings and the research questions and research objectives in order to determine whether they were met. Accordingly, the primary research question (as articulated in Section 1.5.3) is:

What are the lived experiences of women in senior management positions at an ODeL institution in Gauteng Province, South Africa?

The secondary questions addressed in the study were:

- What inherent power structures in an ODeL institution impede the progression of women to top levels?
- Does the institution comply with implementing government policies and acts, which promote the progression of women to senior management positions?
- What are the perceptions of women in higher education management about barriers that hinder them from progression to senior management positions?
- What measures are needed to enhance women's' chances of progressing to senior management positions in institutions of higher learning?

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The demographic profiles or characteristics of the participants were determined in terms of their gender, age, work or employment positions, as well as their educational qualifications. These demographic profiles were established on the basis of the total number (25) of interviews completed with the participants as shown in Table 4.1 below, which also shows the length of all interviews, average duration of each interview; as well as the longest and shortest interviews held.

Table 4.1: Overview of completed interviews

Description	Details
Number of completed interviews	25 participants
Length of all interviews	792,73 minutes
The average duration of interviews	31,70 minutes
Longest Interview	54,34 minutes
Shortest Interview	19,01 minutes

Table 4.1 Indicates that the average duration of each interview was 31,70 minutes, and that the longest interview lasted for 54,34 minutes, while the shortest interview lasted for 19,01 minutes. The twenty-five (25) participants were selected for participation in this study on the basis of the criteria outlined in Sub-section 3.5.4.1.

It is most important to note that all of the personal identifying information concerning each participant was either removed or altered, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. The researcher opted for this measure in order to protect the identity, privacy, and anonymity in compliance with the ethical considerations to which reference has been made in Section 3.9.2 to Section 3.9.4. Furthermore, all direct and direct identifiers of the participants, such as their ages, work locations, actual names, and job titles were generalised, replaced, or removed completely as recommended by authors such as De Jonckheere and Vaughn (2019), Silverman (2020).

4.2.1 Participants' Gender Profile

Figure 4.1 below is a depiction of the participants' gender profile or characteristics.
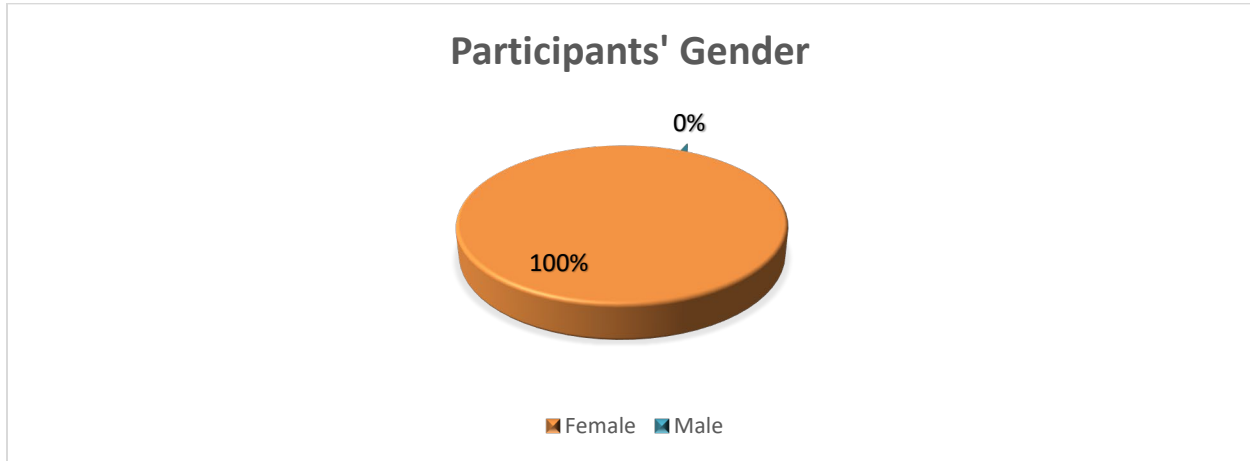
Figure 4.1: Participants' gender profiles/ characteristics

Figure 4.1 indicates that all participants (n=25, 100%) who were selected in the study were females. Therefore, there were no males who were interviewed by the researcher due to a variety of reasons beyond the researcher's control.

4.2.2 Participants' Age Profile

Figure 4.2 represents the participants' age profiles or characteristics.
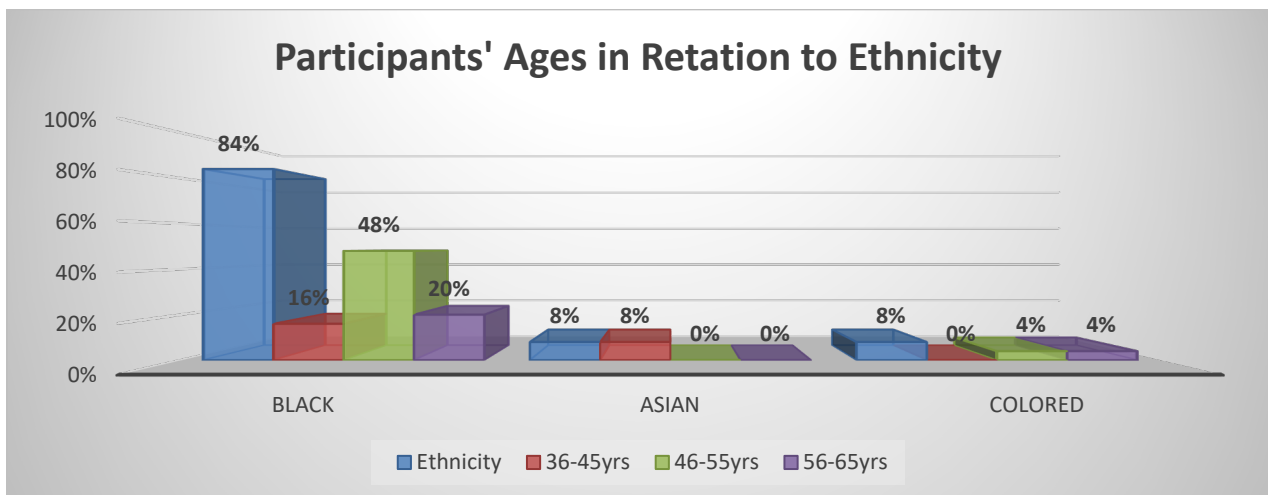
Figure 4.2: Participants ages based on their ethnic groups

Figure 4.2 depicts that the majority of participants (n=21, 84%) are black, followed by only 2 coloured participants (n=2, 8%) as well as another 2 Asian participants (n=2, 8%). In this regard, based on their ages, the majority of the black participants (n=12. 48%) ranged

between 46-55 years, followed by five participants (n=5, 20%) whose ages ranged between 56-65 years. There were only four black participants (n=4, 16%) whose ages ranged between 36-45 years, followed by two coloured participants (n=2, 8%) whose ages range between 36-45 years, as well as one coloured participant (n=1, 4%) who is between 46-55 years of age. In addition, there is only one coloured participant whose age ranges between 56-65 years.

4.2.3 Participants' Positions

Figure 4.3 below is an illustration of the various participants current managerial positions or work profiles at the time of conducting the study.

MANAGEMENT POSITION

8%
28%
64%

■ Top Management ■ Senior Management ■ Middle Management
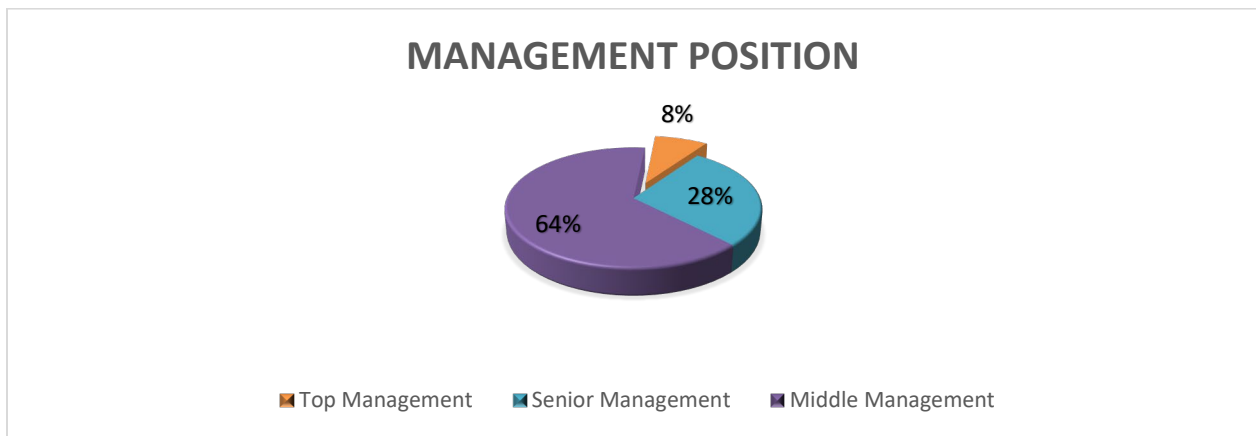
Figure 4.3: Participants management positions

Figure 4.3 shows that the majority of participants (n=16, 64%) are middle managers, followed by seven participants who hold positions of senior management. The minority of participants (n=2, 8%) are in senior management positions. In this regard, it could be ascertained that the profiles adequately matched both the aim and objectives of the study.

4.2.4 Participants' Qualifications/ Educational Background

Figure 4.4 overleaf is a representation of the participants' respective qualifications or educational backgrounds.
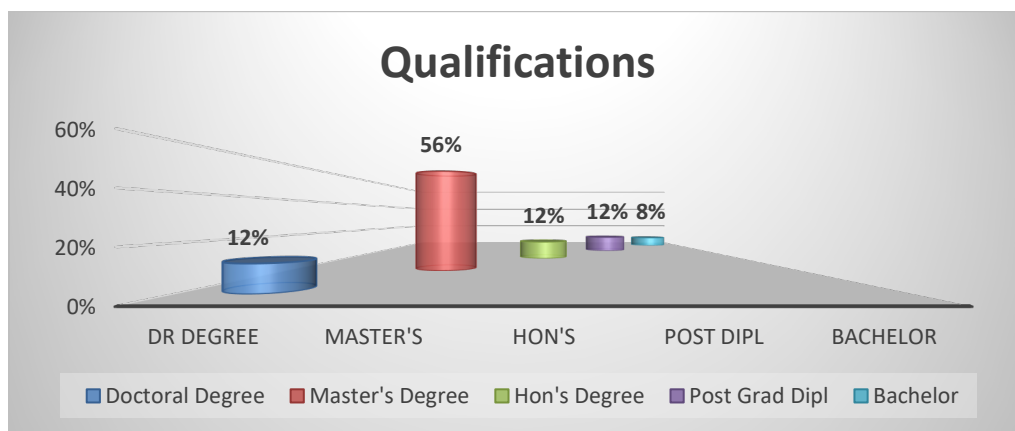
Figure 4.4: Participants qualifications

In terms of Figure 4.4, it is evident that the majority of the female participants (n=14, 56%) have a master's qualifications. Meanwhile 3 (three) participants (n=3, 12%) each had a PhD, Honours, and a Postgraduate Diploma, followed by two participants (n=2, 8%) who had a bachelor's degree. Following is a brief profile of each participant.

4.2.5 Participants' Individual Profiling

The rationale for individualising each participant's demographic profile in this section is to provide more informative details that are relevant for the purpose of the study. Each participant is labelled according to the pseudonym **'P1', 'P2'** and so on, in order to protect their true identities in adherence to the ethical considerations as stated in Section 3.9 of Chapter 3.

P1 is African by ethnicity or nationality, and her age ranges between 46 and 55 years. She is in a senior management position. She has a master's degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus of the ODeL institution. Her contribution enriched the study and contributed to a a better understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that impede women's progression or progression to higher levels of leadership. She has been working for the ODeL for a period of one year, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study.

Based on her position as a top-level manager, **P1** appears to be content and enjoys doing her job. She further mentioned that her position has given her a good understanding of promotion policies. On that note, she seemed to be friendly and cheerful during the interview, although she could not express herself well.

P2 is also African and aged between 36 and 45 years. She is in a middle management position and has an Honours degree. She also works at the Muckleunek Campus. This participant provided in-depth insights into women's experience of the inherent power structures in the ODeL institution. She displayed a critical, in-depth analysis of the women's plight and experiences from an African feminist perspective. The researcher was impressed by her ingenuity because she provided detailed information, which also revealed some vital information that was useful for illuminating the primary findings. As such, the researcher noted that **P2** has been working for the ODeL institution for a period of 5 (five) years in a middle management capacity. In this regard, the researcher included her in the study because of her work experience. In terms of personality, **P2** displayed charisma, a sense of humour and a generally pleasant personality. She was a pleasure to work with. She was skilled, knowledgeable and able to provide her views on gender equality related issues and the consequences of sidelining women from occupying top management positions.

P3 is an African woman who is between 56 and 65 years of age. She holds a middle management position, with four (4) years of experience in that position. She holds a Master's degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus. **P3** has a wealth of knowledge and which researchers desperately need to gather information in order to address the research objectives. Her participation helped the researcher have a clearer impression of the fears and aspirations of women in management positions. On that note, she appeared to have high ambitions, although she expressed her unhappiness in her current capacity. She was a bit emotional when she shared her experiences and sentiments.

P4 is a coloured woman between the ages of 56 and 65. She has been working in the middle management position for two (2) years. She holds a Doctoral degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus. She appeared to be an uncomfortable and frustrated person during the interview session. She expressed her frustration and unhappiness about the promotional processes in the institution, as she is being sidelined for career and management progression even though she has better qualifications than other men and women who are above her in the management ladder. According to her, gender equity and affirmative action policies are not doing much to address the underrepresentation of women in top management positions. Her participation in the interview was extremely beneficial for the study.

P5 is an African woman between the ages of 46 and 55. She holds a middle management position and a Postgraduate Diploma. She has been in an entry-level management position at the Sunnyside campus for three (3) years. Her contribution to understanding the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that impede women's progression to higher levels of leadership was extremely valuable to the study. **P5** was cooperative and eager to contribute towards women's progression and the elimination of gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures that obstruct women's progression to senior management positions.

P6 is an African woman in the 46-to-55-year age cohort. She has held a senior management position for a year now. She has an Honours degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus. Her engagement in several management positions enabled her to gather incredible insights about the plight of women and their desire to be in positions of power and influence. Her involvement in the study offered the researcher a great opportunity to gather rich and thick data, which was needed for the success of the study. P6 was able to articulate and present her views in a clear and coherent manner. As such, her responses did not require much moderation.

P7 is African and aged between 56 and 65 years. She holds a senior management position at Sunnyside Campus. She has four years' experience in her current management position. She is highly qualified, as she is the holder of a Master's degree. She is one of the credible and reliable sources of information that the researcher engaged with throughout the study. She appeared to enjoy working in her position as a top manager and seems to be content considering the glass ceiling she is subjected to in her organisation. **P7** has the gift of oratory, which enabled her to express her views unequivocally and without any grain of ambiguity.

P8 is an Indian woman, aged between 36 and 45 years. She is a senior manager with a Bachelor's degree. P8 works at the Muckleunek campus and has been in this position for two years. During the interview, she appeared to be a very soft-spoken person who only raised her voice when she emphasised her views. She had very deep analytical skills and judgement which she presented regarding the progression of women to senior management positions. She brought a deep understanding of the issue and possible consequences that might impact the ODeL institution if the issue of women's progression

is not addressed urgently. In this regard, her input and viewpoints contributed significantly to the study.

P9 is African, aged between 46 and 55 years. She holds a middle management position and has a Bachelor's degree. This participant works at the Muckleunek Campus and has three (3) years of working experience as a middle manager. This participant presented her experience in a manner that assisted the researcher in gathering the necessary data to achieve the study's objectives. Her participation contributes to the exploration and description of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that impede women's progression to higher levels of leadership. As such, she was capable of clearly expressing her views without much probing from the researcher. She was on point on every question and her interaction with the researcher was warm and cordial. Establishing rapport between the researcher and the participant at the outset of the interview was critical in fostering positive communication and ensuring the interview ran smoothly.

P10 is an African woman in the 46–55-year age group and holds a senior management position. She has a Master's degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus. The interaction with this participant was also fruitful, as she was very willing to provide information, which eventually contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership in an ODeL institution, for which she has been working as a manager for eight (8) years. Her vast experience was very valuable to the researcher. Her conduct during the interview portrays that she is an authentic leader who has a passion to see other women progress both in academia and management circles. The researcher enjoyed discussing with her issues related to women's progress. This woman presented herself in an ethical and professional manner. Her humility and respect for diversity help me to understand that she is a capable leader who can do well for the progression of women in leadership and management.

P11 is an African woman between the ages of 46 years and 55 and she holds a middle management position. She has a Master's degree and also works at the Muckleunek Campus. She contributed to the researcher's understanding of the inherent power structures that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership in an ODeL institution. **P11** has been working for the ODeL institution for one year, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study. Furthermore, she is content with her

current position and has the zeal to advocate for women's progression and representation in management positions. Furthermore, she was also cooperative, amicable, and upbeat throughout the interview. The researcher did not struggle to understand her views and perspectives on the topic at hand.

P12 is African, aged between 56 and 65 years, and holds a senior management position. Also, she holds a Master's degree and works at the Sunnyside Campus. She contributed with an understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership. She has been working at the selected ODeL institution for one year, which qualifies her as an experienced source of information for the study.

P13 is Asian woman who is aged between 36 and 45 years. She holds a senior management position with a Master's degree and works at Muckleunek Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership. **P13** has been working at the institution for a period of five (5) years, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study.

P14 is an African woman in the 46–55-year age category. She holds a senior management position, has a Master's degree and works at the Sunnyside Campus. Her participation produced significant insights on the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership. **P14** has been working at the ODeL institution for 12 years, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study. She appeared to be content with her work.

P15 is an African woman aged between 56 and 65 years. She holds a senior management position, has a Master's degree, and works at the Muckleunek Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership. She has been working at the ODeL institution for nine (9) years, which qualifies her to be a suitable informant with the experience and information required by the researcher. **P15** appeared to be ambitious and optimistic that she would progress to senior management positions sometime in the future.

P16 is a Coloured woman aged between 46 and 55 years and also holds a middle management position. She has a Diploma and works at the Sunnyside Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership in an ODeL institution. She has been working at the ODeL institution of higher learning for 7 (seven) years, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study.

P17 is African, aged between 46 and 55 years old and also holds a middle management position. Furthermore, she holds a Master's degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership in an ODeL institution. **P17** has been working at the ODeL institution for 6 (six) years, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study. She enjoys working in her position as a senior manager, and mentioned that the position has given her a good understanding of promotion policies.

P18 is an African woman, aged between 46 and 55 years, and holds a middle management position. In addition, she holds an Honour's degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership in an ODeL institution, for which she has been working for eleven years, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study. **P18** appeared to enjoy working in her position as a top manager and mentioned that it has given her a good understanding of promotion policies.

P19 is an African woman aged between 36 and 45 years, holds a middle management position, and has a Master's degree. She is stationed at the Muckleunek Campus, where she has been working for thirteen years. Her participation contributed to the researcher's comprehension of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that inhibit women's progression or progression to higher levels of leadership. Her thirteen years of service history at the ODeL institution qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study.

P20 is an African woman who is between the 46 and 55-year age cohort and holds a senior management position. Additionally, she holds a Postgraduate diploma and works

at the Muckleunek Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership. Furthermore, **P20** has been working for the ODeL institution for ten years, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study.

P21 is an African woman aged between the ages of 46 and 55. She holds a middle management position, has a PhD and works at the Sunnyside Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to the understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership. **P21** has been working at the OdeL institution for sixteen years, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study. She appears to have lost hope of any progression to a senior management position.

P22 is an African woman, whose age was between 56 and 65 years and who holds a middle management position. She holds a Doctoral degree and works at the Sunnyside Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership. She has been working for the ODeL institution for eleven years, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study.

P23 is Coloured, aged between 36 and 45 years old, holds a middle management position, has a Master's degree and works at Sunnyside Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to an understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership. **P23** has been working for the ODeL institution for 7 (seven) years, which qualifies her for the study as an experienced staff member.

P24 is an African female aged between 46 and 55 years and holds a middle management position. She also holds a Master's degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to an understanding of the inherent power structures that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership in an ODeL institution, for which she has been working for eight (8) years, which qualifies her for participation as an experienced staff member in this study.

P25 is African, aged between 36 and 45 years, and holds a middle management position. In addition, she holds a Master's degree and works at the Muckleunek Campus. Her participation enriched the study and contributed to our understanding of the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder women's progression to higher levels of leadership and management. **P25** has been working for the ODeL institution for a year, which qualifies her as an experienced staff member for the study. Moreover, **P25** seems to enjoy working in her position as a senior manager, and she mentioned that the position has given her a good understanding of promotion policies.

4.3 FINDINGS AND THEIR THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

Whereas the previous section presented the participants' demographic characteristics or profiles, the current section focuses wholly on the actual findings, which serve as the seminal evidence of the study (Billups, 2021; De Jonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Therefore, the findings presented in this section are reflective of the analysed interview-based participant statements or responses.

In that regard, four (4) superordinate themes emerged from the data collected, namely: inherent power structures; institutional compliance; perceptions of the glass ceiling; and the competencies and skills women need. In essence, the global or superordinate themes and attendant sub-themes or categories represented in Table 4.2 depict the participants' perspectives and perceptions concerning women's progression or progression at the selected Gauteng Province ODeL institution.

Table 4.2: Participants' perspectives on women's progression at an ODeL institution

Superordinate/ Global Themes	Sub-themes	Relevant objective linked with the theme
Theme 1: Inherent power structures	Patriarchal structures Acknowledgement of male standards Gendered and stereotyped power structures	To explore the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that impede the progression of women to senior management and leadership roles.
Theme 2: Institutional compliance with government gender equality legislation	Gender equity policies and acts Implementation of gender equity policies	To determine the ODeL institution's extent of compliance with the implementation of policies and laws that seek to promote the progression of women to senior management positions within the organisation.
Theme 3: Perceptions of Glass the Ceiling	Factors obstructing women's progression. Visible patriarchal features are fostering the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling's impact on female managers	To explore perceptions concerning the glass ceiling that hinders women from progressing to senior positions in higher education management
Theme 4: The competence and skills women require	Basic leadership competency and skills Structural changes Gender equity policies play a role	To explore measures needed to enhance women's' chances of progressing to senior management positions at the ODeL institutions of higher learning.

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At the conclusion of each italicised excerpt, the abbreviations **'P1'**, '**P2**', and so on indicate the source of the narrated statement. Some narrated statements appear multiple times, indicating that the interconnectedness of the themes represents the participants' perspectives as a fundamental aspect of human discourse (Walliman, 2015).

4.3.1 Theme 1: Inherent Power Structures

This main or superordinate theme relates to the participants' perspectives about the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that hinder or restrict women's progression or progression of women to senior management and leadership positions. This theme generated 3 (three) sub-thematic categories, namely: patriarchal structures; recognition of male standards; and gender stereotypes. These sub-thematic categories explain or describe the participants' perspectives on the inherent power structures that impede or inhibit the progression of women to senior management positions.

> **P8:** *Even though we have different experiences in view of the progression of women, I believe as women we still share common views and challenges that hurt us in a similar manner. However, some of our experiences are unique in terms of our personal and professional encounters.*

4.3.1.1 Sub-Theme 1: Patriarchal structures

This subtheme is based on the participants' experiences with patriarchal structures inherent to the ODeL institution of higher education. The findings revealed that patriarchal structures constitute some of the institutionalised power systems within the ODeL that impede women's progression to senior management positions. As depicted below, the majority of participants demonstrate that the ODeL institution has a patriarchal and male-dominated power structure:

> **P1:** *The institution is operating on traditional power structures that do not favour women's progression and it would take some time to adopt newly defined structures that will open more opportunities for women.*

P17: *Patriarchal norms have promoted the culture of male hegemony, which treats women as second-class citizens.*

In the above context, **P1** and **P2** highlighted that the OdeL Institution is guided by traditional patriarchal power structures, which are anti-women leadership. In that regard, the participants' thoughts and experiences are listed below:

P2*: Patriarchy ideology is deeply entrenched in the institution; hence, women's progression is regarded with a pinch of salt*.
P7*: Patriarchy is the main structure women are battling with for recognition in management positions.*
P10: *The patriarchal ideology inherent in the institution perpetuates the myth that women have less intellectual and physical potential than men.*

P2: Is is highlighted that patriarchy is a deep structure in the ODeL institution and it difficult to dismantle.

P7: In agreement with the above participant **P2**, it was noted that patriarchy is the main obstacle that impedes women's progression to senior management positions. In the same vein,

P10: It is highlighted that adherence to patriarchal ideology has resulted in the myth that women are incapable leaders as compared to men. **P2, P7** and **P10** narrated their experiences as follows:

4.3.1.2 Sub-Theme 2: Acknowledgement of male leadership standards over women's standards

Based on the study, the researcher noted that women are failing to progress to senior management positions because of the inherent power structures that seemingly endorse male leadership standards over women's standards. Traditionally, it is acknowledged that women should prioritise family responsibilities above all other responsibilities outside the home. Consequently, women do not necessarily attain the same landmarks as men at the same chronological level. The majority of women who participated in the study asserted that leadership behaviours are predominantly associated with masculine traits in the ODeL context.

In the majority of instances, women have observed that behaviour traits deemed attractive in males are viewed negatively when exhibited by women; they are perceived as negative influencers in the company. Women generally display a more servant-leadership style,

which is considered ineffective according to the inherent patriarchal leadership structures inherent in the ODeL institution. It appears to be very challenging for women to advance to positions in senior management since the institution is inherently patriarchal. According to the majority of the women who participated in the study, the organisation's leadership decision-making process is fundamentally gendered and androgynous. Thus, the participants related and argued that women continue to experience patriarchal structures of masculine values, power, and dominance. Following are the participants' statements.

> **P4:** *In my view, the culture of masochism is inherent, as men always think that they are better managers than women.*
> **P6:** *The power structure is male dominated and it does not leave room for female power to be active.*
> **P15:** *The hierarchical structure is in favour of men, who still consider themselves superior to women.*
> **P18:** *Males are still dominating in leadership and management positions despite efforts by the government to push for a 50/50 power structure.*
> **P24:** *There is a deliberate systemic arrangement of sidelining women in senior management positions through inadequate compliance with gender equity laws and policies.*

The majority of the participants perceive that there is significant recognition and acknowledgement of male leadership standards over women's feminine standards and characteristics. Participants emphasised that male dominance and chauvinistic orientations they are experiencing are the precursors of the glass ceiling they are subjected to on a daily basis. Therefore, it emerged that the recognition of male standards of leadership over women's standards is an inherent power structure that impedes the progression of women to senior management positions at the ODeL institution of higher learning.

4.3.1.3 Sub-Theme 3: Gendered and stereotyped power structures

In light of the fact that there are numerous corrective measures, including legislation, aimed at achieving an equally represented workforce in South Africa, the researcher wanted to find solutions to the problem of gender discrimination in the workplace. The majority of participants in this study observed that the ODeL institution continues to be plagued by gendered power structures that seek to marginalise women who aspire to advance to senior management positions. The gendered power structures comprise gender stereotypes and prejudices, which are used as instruments to thwart women's

progression in senior management positions. Following are statements expressed by some of the participants in the latter regard.

> **P3**: *Male dominance is choking the breath and space for women leadership and progression*.
> **P5***: Traditional attitudes of male dominance are visible in the promotion process.*
> **P9**: *The gendered power relations dynamics in the institution persistently preserve the glass ceiling for women managers.*

Extrapolated from the above-cited excerpts, it appears as if the majority of the participants were advocating for the elimination and destruction of gendered power structures. Thus, the participants emphasised the need for the ODeL institution to disregard the issue of gender when promoting men and women to positions of senior management. Both men and women should be promoted based on merit and their ability to perform their designated duties, as mentioned by the following participants:

> **P13:** *Systematically, the institution is riddled with hierarchy and systemic inequality.*
> **P20:** *Gender stereotypes dominate the current institutional structure.*
> **P21:** *The gender stereotype system is connected to a lack of women in senior management level positions*.
> **P22:** *The power structures promote gender stereotypes and male dominance.*
> **P24:** *Leadership stereotypes are negatively influencing the progression of women into senior management positions*.
> **P12:**
> **P14:** *The legacy of gender prejudice propels systemic inequality which limits the chances for women's progression.*
> **P16:** *There is a huge gender imbalance between women and men in leadership.*
> **P25:**

The findings regarding the first superordinate theme were primarily based on the participants' personal experiences as female managers at the ODeL higher education institution. The participants discussed the inherent power structures within the ODeL institution that inhibit the progression of women to senior management positions. Their shared experiences hinged on the impediments that create a glass ceiling for aspiring female managers. In addition, the participants identified a variety of factors at the ODeL institution of higher education that may impede women's progression to senior management positions. In general, the participants reported that the authorities should be gender-blind when promoting potential managers to positions of senior management.

The participants pinpointed that addressing gender prejudices, stereotyping, patriarchal tendencies, and systematic inequality in ODeL institutions of higher education is crucial. Similarly, Rosa et al. (2020) mention that higher education institutions remain gendered organisations. On that note, Mdleleni et al. (2021) indicate that the number of women in leadership positions in developing countries is not increasing. While the concept of a single dominant form of masculinity is increasingly being questioned, patriarchal power structures continue to support a social system in which women and the feminine remain subordinate (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021). The institution's intrinsic patriarchal philosophy, according to the following participants:

P1: *The institution is operating on old power systems that do not favour women's growth.*
P10: "*Perpetuates the belief that women have lower intellectual and physical potential than men*.

Consistently, the structural cultural milieu of the higher education environment has been cited as one of the inherent power structures that contribute to women's marginalisation and underrepresentation in senior managerial positions in higher education institutions. Gallagher and Morison (2019) posit that the patriarchal essence of society perpetuates male dominance in leadership. South African women's access to higher education has increased; however, women still occupy positions primarily in middle management, and progression to senior management positions remains difficult due to the inherent power structures prevalent in higher education institutions (Gallagher & Morison, 2019; Shinbrot et al., 2019).

Literature on women's leadership in higher education reflects structural and cultural power structures that impede women's progression to senior management positions. Similarly, previous research has demonstrated that higher education institutions remain gendered organisations (Rosa et al., 2020). Similar findings from multiple studies indicate that the number of women in leadership positions in developing countries is not increasing (Mdleleni et al., 2021). While the concept of a single dominant form of masculinity is increasingly being questioned, patriarchal power structures continue to support a social system in which women and the feminine remain subordinate (Aboim & Vasconcelos, 2021; Hearn, 2020). The following sub-section addresses institutional compliance with government gender equality legislation and policies.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Institutional Compliance with Government Gender Equality Legislation and Policies

Consequently, this superordinate theme is comprised of two (2) sub-thematic categories (ODeL institution-guiding gender equity policies and laws; implementation of gender equity policies).

4.3.2.1 Sub-Theme 2.1: Gender policies and laws guiding the ODeL institution

In this subtheme, the researcher presents laws and policies that, if observed, might facilitate or influence gender equality in the progression of both men and women at the ODeL institution or any other higher education institution in South Africa.

4.3.2.1.1 Employment Equity Act (EEA) (No. 55 of 1998)

According to the participants, the comprehensive implementation of the EeA in the ODeL institution of higher education could aid in eliminating the inherent power structures that impede women's progression to positions of senior management. The participants' perspectives varied according to their individual and managerial expertise, as demonstrated below.

> **P1:** *The institution is guided by the Employment Equity Act.*
> **P4:** *The EEA is the master legal instrument used to guide gender related issues in women's and men's progressio*n.
> **P6 and P10:** *We have an employment equity policy, but it simply states that the institution believes in Employment Equity and diversity, but we have no targets for women's representation in management positions. So, this institution should have an employment equity plan and targets specifically for promoting women's progression to senior management positions.*

Some participants repeatedly mentioned the role of Employment Equity plans and targets in promoting the progression of women to senior management positions, despite the diversity of perceptions among women in management. Furthermore, they acknowledged the connection between Employment Equity implementation and compliance with the promotion of women to senior management positions without discrimination.

The majority of participants were unanimous and unequivocal regarding the role of the EEA in promoting and facilitating the progression of women to positions of senior

management. The following participants expressed concerns regarding the fragmented and insufficient implementation of the EEA at the ODeL institution of higher education.

> **P5:** *The EEA is in place, but I feel it's outdated and needs to be revised in line with the current developments in women's emancipation*.
> **P7:** *The policies and statutory instruments are there, such as the EEA, but they are not followed … and the Women's Forum*.
> **P16:** *EEA, is followed and implemented, but I feel it's outdated*.
> **P23:** *EEA compliance ensures aligning with legislative frameworks and government constitutional obligations.*

Only a few participants indicated that the organisation adequately implements and adheres to the EEA.

Based on the following participants' statements, the EEA is used to inform the progression process; hence, women are not sidelined at all.

> **P15:** *EEA is used to inform the progression process.*
> **P12:** *Our organisational environment has developed its own policies accordance with the EEA.*

4.3.2.1.2 Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) and Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998)

This theme focuses on the role of the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) and the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) in promoting the women's progression to senior management positions. A small proportion of participants indicated that the EEA and the Skills Development Act are the legal instruments used to facilitate the progression of women to senior management positions.

> **P2:** *The EEA and Skills Development Act are the policies and laws that monitor compliance but are not streamlined to the progression of any gender*.
> **P8:** *The EEA and Skills Development Act are in place to guide the gender related progression of staff members*.
> **P10:** *EEA and Skills Development Act are the policies and laws that monitor compliance but are not streamlined to the progression of any gender*.
> **P19:** *Skills Development Act and the Employment Equity Act guide the progression procedures*.
> **P20:** *The EEA and Skills Development Act are policies and laws that monitor compliance but are not streamlined to progression of any gender*.
> **P24:** *EEA and Skills Development Act are the policies and laws that monitor compliance but are not streamlined to the progression of any gender*.

The above-cited participants were of the view that the EEA and the Skills Development Act are the legal instruments that are used to guide and monitor institutional compliance with gender equality policies and regulations in South African organisations. In this regard, the findings indicate that the institution is governed by laws and policies that promote the progression of women to senior management positions.

The majority of participants cited the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998), and the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998), as the governing and monitoring legal frameworks for gender equality in the progression of women. The subsequent section discusses compliance and implementation of gender equity laws and policies at the in question ODeL institution.

4.3.2.2 Sub-Theme 2.2: Compliance and implementation of gender equity legislation and policies

This sub-theme focuses on the participants' opinions and assessments of the regarding the ODeL institution of higher education's compliance of the with gender equity policies and legal instruments that seek to promote equal representation of women in management positions. The participants indicated that the institution did not generally adhere to the implementation of policies and laws that aim to promote the progression of women to senior management positions. The following interview excerpts illustrate how the absence of policy implementation impedes the progression of women to senior management positions.

> **P2:** *Not much is done to comply with the law, as few women are appointed to senior management.*
> **P5:** *The will to implement gender equality laws is questionable therefore, senior management must enforce the policies to ensure compliance with the laws.*
> **P6:** *In my view, there is limited implementation of laws and policies.*

Participants were of the opinion that the ODeL institution's implementation of women's progression policies was inadequate. Participants implied that the lackadaisical implementation of gender equity legislation and policies is largely responsible for the limited progression of women to senior management positions. Regarding compliance with gender equity laws, the majority of the participants believed that the government, through the Department of Labour and the Department of Higher Education and

Technology, should do more to assure compliance with legal instruments. Lack of policy compliance was regarded as a major cause for women's sidelining as far as progression into senior management positions is concerned. The participants' views and sentiments are captured below.

> **P8:** *There is little compliance because recently a woman has been appointed for a VC position*.
> **P10:** *The current leadership complies with policies on calling for interviews, but appointments are mostly for men*.
> **P11:** *Compliance is malicious and rather suspicious*.
> **P14:** *Compliance is minimal; therefore, senior management must enforce the policies*.
> **P15:** *Gender parity policies are somehow poorly implemented, and compliance is questionable due to prevalent patriarchal ideology in the system*.
> **P16:** *There are still imbalances and loopholes in the implementation of the policies*.
> **P17:** *Limited implementation of gender laws and policies is the order of the day, so the compliance issue needs attention.*
> **P22:** *Not much is done to comply with gender equality laws, as few women are appointed*.
> **P25:** *Not much is done by the senior management to enforce the policies that promote women's progression to senior management positions*.

Furthermore, participants displayed divergent views regarding the compliance of ODeL institutions' gender equity legislation in an endeavour to promote women's progression to senior management positions. Some agreed and some disagreed that the ODeL institution is trying to comply, while others said nothing is being done by the institution. Men consistently received promotions over the past few years, showing the institution's non-compliance with the gender equity 50/50 representation criterion.

The below-cited participants reflected on non-compliance as one of the primary causes of the lack of progression of women to senior management positions.

> **P16 and P20:** *Most women who are better qualified as compared to some men have not progressed to senior management positions due to a lack of the will to comply with gender equity legislation and policies. In this regard, gender discrimination and prejudice are still rampant as women are sidelined for promotional positions*.
> **P1:** *Umm the gender equality laws and policies are not complied with. I possess the qualifications that are required for several senior management positions, but I have*

not progressed to those positions for several years. The non-compliance of the institution with gender laws and policies is really frustrating to me.

P4: *Gender equity policies are implemented differently at different departments. Promotions are unfairly done … only a few women have progressed to senior management positions. The majority of the people who progressed to senior management positions are men.*

P13: *Policies are implemented differently at departments … it is difficult to indicate the extent of compliance then*.

P19: *The appointment of a female VC clearly shows that effort is being made to comply with gender equity laws*.

P21: *So far, I think the university complies with gender laws. I made progressed recently after competing for the same position with several women*.

The second superordinate theme focuses primarily on the pieces of legislation that should be implemented to guarantee gender equality in the promotion of ODeL managers from lower management levels to senior management levels. Participants at the questioned ODeL institution identified the EEA and the Skills Development Act as the key legal instruments to assure gender equality in the progression of women.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Perceptions Concerning the Glass Ceiling

The third superordinate theme of this study pertains to women's perceptions of the glass ceiling prevalent at the questioned ODeL institution and its effect on the progression of women to senior management positions. In this disregard, numerous and divergent perspectives were presented and emphasised by the participants. This superordinate theme consists of 3 (three) thematic categories, namely: factors impeding women's progression; conspicuous patriarchal characteristics fostering the glass ceiling; and the effect of the glass ceiling on the progression of women managers.

4.3.3.1 Sub-Theme 1: Factors that obstruct women's progression to senior management positions

All participants concurred that internal and external impediments exist that impede the progression of women to senior management positions. External barriers included those factors that are significantly influenced by societal beliefs, cultural preconceptions, as well as cultural and traditional views. Five (5) sub-thematic categories emerged as factors obstructing women's progression to senior management positions. These are: traditional

patriarchal hegemony; inadequate implementation of gender equality legislation; lack of leadership mentorship; inferior qualifications and skills; and work-life conflict. These factors are discussed below.

> **P2:** *The main factor that is obstructing our progression as women is the traditional patriarchal hegemony. This is a huge stumbling block towards women's progression.*
> **P6**: *The prevailing male-dominated structures ensure that gender equity is not exercised from the bottom up to the senior management levels.*

4.3.3.1.1 Traditional patriarchal hegemony

The findings revealed that the progression of women to senior management positions is perceived as a violation of the patriarchal norm. In patriarchal societies, women are culturally expected to submit to males, as confirmed by Hill et al. (2016), who posit that cultural norms pose a substantial barrier to the progression of women to senior management positions. Accepted value systems, social conventions, and governing principles influence how organisations manage career progressions, according to Akram (2017). The following participants' statements confirm the above-mentioned point of view:

> **P9:** *Women are hesitant to progress to senior management roles because, in my observation, males in positions of power frequently undermine the judgement of women in those positions*.
> **P14**: *Male-oriented organisational culture and beliefs work against women's progression*.
> **P15:** *Senior managers are mostly men who preside over a gendered culture that excludes and marginalises women managers.*
> **P16:** *I think sometimes it's organisational politics and union male dominance influence that resultantly lead to women's marginalisation*.
> **P17:** *Organisational practices promote and define masculine values and behaviours*.
> **P18:** *Gender stereotypes about women have an adverse impact on the assessments and judgements made for progression purposes*.
> **P19**: *Women are expected to conform to male norms; if they do not, they risk being judged and evaluated negatively*.
> **P20:** *Women face a dilemma due to the incompatibility of the roles of mother, wife and manager*.
> **P23:** *The glass ceiling for women is a reality due to male-oriented organisational culture and beliefs, which perpetuate discriminatory tendencies against women.*

P24: *The institution's failure to implement policies and obsession with old norms and ideologies water down the desire for women to progress to senior management positions.*

4.3.3.1.2 Inadequate implementation of the gender equality legislation

The participants unanimously highlighted that women's progression is obstructed by the inadequate and non-existent application of gender policies that support equality between men and women. Particularly, the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998), was cited as a tool that is flawed and restricts the progression of women. The lack of women-focused mentoring and leadership training was cited as a concern by the following participants:

P4: *Inadequate implementation of gender-based policies such as EEA is a stumbling block towards women's progression.*
P5: *Non-compliance with the Employment Equity Act obstructs women's progression.*
P10: *Men are not making it easier for women to rise to senior positions by inconsistently implementing gender equality policies.*
P13: *Lack of practice of policies or EEA obstructs the progress of women to high level management positions.*
P16: *Government policies advocate for gender equality, but there is no effective enforcement of policies.*
P17: *Equity is not exercised from the bottom up, and this hinders women's progression ambitions.*
P21*: The progression policy does not include strategic intentions and tactics to specifically redress the gender imbalance and the glass ceiling.*
P24: *The limited implementation of gender equality policies or EEA obstructs the women's progress.*
P25: *The Employment Equity Act is not fully implemented and complied with.*

4.3.3.1.3 Lack of leadership mentorship

The majority of participants concurred that a lack of leadership mentoring is a barrier that prevents women from advancing to senior management positions.

P1: *Lack of mentorship and leadership programmes earmarked specifically for women derails the progression of women to senior management programmes … without such programmes, women lack the skills needed to be effective and capable leaders.*
P7: *Women's progression is obstructed because career growth programmes for women in the institution are minimal.*
P1: *Mainly, I feel there is no man who is interested in improving the capabilities of women in leadership.*

P19: *Career growth onboarding schemes for women's progression in the institution are minimal, so women's aspirations are curtailed by this lack at times.*

P10: *Lack of high-level female mentors at the top management level can be attributed to the glass ceiling … we don't have female mentors, however, now that we have two women at the top level, we hope that women's progression to senior management will be facilitated.*

P11: *Women managers' supervisors do not provide them with important senior management information and opportunities.*

P12: *The is a lack of mentoring and networking opportunities for women managers at the middle management level.*

P13: *Lack of social support from male organisational managers is an obstacle to women's progression.*

P22: *Potential women managers are incapacitated due to a lack of mentoring opportunities specifically for women managers at the middle management level.*

4.3.3.1.4 Inferior Qualifications and Skills

The view expressed by the participants highlights the view that women need to upgrade themselves academically in order to compete effectively with men, as articulated below by the participants:

P3: *… the major obstacles are only inferior qualifications and skills possessed by the women aspiring to be leaders ….*

P12: *… most women don't have the qualifications and leadership competencies required by effective managers ….*

P23: *… basically, it's only the issue of qualifications and skills that obstructs women's progression.*

4.3.3.1.5 Work-life conflict

Some participants pointed out that work-life conflict also contributes to the glass ceiling for women aspiring to senior management positions. The accompanying excerpts provide evidence of the opinions expressed in this regard.

P21: *Work-life conflict is more pronounced for women than for males... This diminishes the perception of women's competence in the workplace, thereby decreasing the likelihood of their progression to senior management positions.*

P25: *The antagonism between professional and family roles makes the glass ceiling phenomenon prevail over ambitious women in management.*

According to the views and experiences of the participants in this study, there are a multitude of obstacles impeding women's progression and ultimately creating a glass

ceiling. It was abundantly evident from the following participants' views that factors such as these contribute to the glass ceiling for women.

> **P5:** *There is no recognition of the women's efforts and capabilities … as a result, women are largely segregated for progression.*
> **P9:** *Many perceive women as being incapable managers.*
> **P21:** *More men than women are being promoted indicating that the only capable leaders are men.*

4.3.3.2 Sub-Theme 2: Visible patriarchal features fostering the glass ceiling

In this sub-theme, the participants relate to the visible patriarchal characteristics that, according to the study's participants, nurture the glass ceiling. All the participants concurred that there are visible patriarchal elements within the ODeL that impede the progression of women. The majority of participants emphasised that the institutions entrenched patriarchy and visible patriarchal elements have significantly impeded women's progression to executive positions. The participants agreed that more men than women hold positions in senior management because the majority of women are viewed as less capable of serving as effective leaders.

> **P1:** *More men are appointed as managers because patriarchal values are entrenched in the institution.*
> **P3:** *The belief that women are inferior to men is hindering the progression of women to senior management positions.*
> **P4:** *The chauvinistic belief is shaping the perception that women are not capable of being leaders.*
> **P23:** *Men are appointed to management positions at an astonishing pace – a glass escalator phenomenon.*
> **P25:** *Women are viewed as inferior and incapable candidates for management positions, revealing signs and symptoms of patriarchy.*

Education is a key factor in attaining gender equality (Zulu, 2021). However, women in management roles in the ODeL institution are still experiencing severe discrimination. A minority of the participants indicated that visible patriarchal structures include gender preconceptions, beliefs, and norms. In higher education, gender stereotypes develop as a result of family, media, and socially attitudes (Islam & Asadullah, 2018). The current study has established a connection between gender stereotypes and the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions.

The following participant extracts attest that women are frequently subject to discrimination and have become targets of sexist and bigoted persecution due to factors such as the socialisation and normalisation of stereotypes:

> **P2:** *Even though some women might have better qualifications, they are not considered for progression to senior management positions due to the attitude of their male counterparts who are involved in the progression system.*
> **P8:** *The mindset of the people in the organisation is still guided by old power structures that sideline women leaders.*
> **P10:** *Gender stereotypes influence decisions to appoint men against a woman for progression towards management … gender stereotypes influence decisions to appoint men against a woman for progression towards management.*
> **P16***: The system has socialised men and women to believe that successful leaders possess characteristics that are associated with men – objectivity, aggressiveness and self-confidence/ among others.*
> **P22:** *Female managers are treated with scepticism due to gender stereotypes and norms perpetuated by male-dominated leadership.*

Very few participants noted that the old school boy network and the glass ceiling issue are visible features that impede the progression of women to senior management positions. This view was expressed by the following participants as follows:

> **P7:** *Men in management positions seek out other men as they strive to avoid being surrounded by women in the boardroom.*
> **P13:** *The mindset of the people in the organisation is still guided by old power structures that sideline women leaders.*
> **P15:** *The old boy networks and mechanisms are in place and are running the show.*
> **P18:** *Women are prevented from progressing beyond certain management levels – the glass ceiling phenomenon.*
> **P20:** *Women's progression is limited to middle management levels because of the old boys' network.*

4.3.3.3 Sub-Theme 3: The implication of having few women in senior management positions

This study's third sub-theme focuses on the effects of having few women in senior management positions at the ODeL institution in Pretoria, Gauteng Province. In this regard, the majority of participants concurred that having few women in senior management positions has negative implications.

The dearth of women in positions of leadership significantly hampers the government's call for gender equality in all institutions. Therefore, the leadership's commitment to advancing women to senior management positions must address these implications. Four (4) sub-thematic categories emerged to emphasise the ramifications of having few women in senior management positions at the ODeL organisation. These are: the suppression of women's agency and voices; lack of diversity in the ODeL institution, obstruction by the government and constitutional gender equality stipulations and limited women's leadership development.

4.3.3.3.1 Suppression of women's agency and voices

The suppression of women's agency and voices emerged as a negative outcome, which will prevail in the ODeL institution if few women progress to senior management positions. Participants, however, were of the opinion that the lack of women's progression to senior management positions would promote women's underrepresentation, resulting in a gender imbalance. Long-term, women's feelings will not be expressed or recognised. As demonstrated by the following narratives, very few participants suggested that the lack of women in senior management positions suppresses women's agency and voice.

> **P6:** *There will be no balance, no equity, and no equity between genders.*
> **P9:** *The sentiments of women are not expressed and known or defended at the top level.*
> **P16:** *Women won't be cushioned from any adverse decisions that violate gender equity.*

4.3.3.3.2 Lack of diversity in the ODeL institution

Several participants expressed the view that limited progression led to a lack of diversity in the ODeL institution.

> **P3:** *The institution is missing out on the societal and institutional benefits of greater diversity, as required by legislation.*
> **P11:** *The collaboration that can achieve diversity in management will not be achieved in the institution.*
> **P12:** *There will be limited gender diversity at the senior management level, as required by legislation.*
> **P15:** *The leadership will not make balanced decisions.*
> **P21:** *The promotion of gender diversity at the senior management level will be limited.*
> **P22:** *As required by legislation, the institution will fail to uphold the societal and institutional benefits of greater diversity.*

4.3.3.3.3 Obstruction of government and constitutional gender equality initiatives

Participants further expressed that the limited number of women advancing to senior management positions should be reduced as it hinders government and constitutional gender equality initiatives. In this regard, participants argued that several measures should be in place in an attempt to promote a 50/50 representation at senior management positions, as reflected in the excerpts below.

> **P1:** *Having fewer women in top management positions upsets the government's drive for gender equality in all institutions.*
> **P8:** *Male dominance will be perpetuated, and this will defeat the national transformation agenda aimed at empowering women in all domains of society.*
> **P18:** *Few women in management positions imply a limited gender balance and equity between genders.*
> **P20:** *Sentiments of women are not expressed and known or defended at the top level.*

4.3.3.3.4 Limited women's leadership development

The participants also highlighted that the scarcity of women in senior management positions at the ODeL institution is a regressive management phenomenon that will limit the development of women leaders. As such, the participants believed that the progression of women to senior management positions was just as crucial as the progression of men to senior management positions. The following quotations illustrate the opinions expressed in this regard:

> **P4:** *There is no leadership growth in women as there will be limited opportunities for them.*
> **P5:** *Women won't have top-notch mentorship.*
> **P13:** *There is no growth in women's leadership capabilities.*
> **P23:** *There will be limited progression of females through internal processes,*
> **P24:** *Few women in management positions means that there is no growth in women.*
> **P25:** *Women won't have mentorship at the top management level.*

4.3.4 Theme 4: Measures to be Adopted to Enhance the Progression of Women to Senior Management Positions

The fourth subordinate focuses specifically on the measures to be implemented to accelerate the progression of women to senior management positions. The participants identified several competencies and skills that women ought to possess in order to compete on an equal level with men. Furthermore, the participants pointed out that a lack

of fundamental leadership competencies and skills hinders women's progression to senior management positions. In addition, the participants mentioned the need to adopt and implement structural changes to facilitate the progression of women to senior management positions.

This superordinate theme comprises 3 (three) thematic categories, namely: fundamental leadership competency and skills; structural changes to be adopted and implemented; and the role of gender equity policies in addressing the inherent gender inequality in the progression of women to senior management positions. These 3 (three) categories generated an additional 2 (two) sub-thematic categories, which are discussed further below.

4.3.4.1 Sub-Theme 4.1: Basic leadership competencies and skills

The majority of participants indicated that women's ability to progress to senior management roles depends heavily on the competencies and skills they have earned. Hence, opinions on the basic leadership competencies and skills that women should develop to progress to senior management roles are offered and analysed in this subsection.

4.3.4.1.1 Mentorship

Several participants proposed that women in management should be provided with exceptional and quality mentorship to enhance their chances of progressing to senior management positions. They recommended that quality and intensive mentoring be required to prepare women for senior management positions. According to the premise that leaders are not born, women should be provided with support, training, and development programmes. The need for women's mentorship is articulated in the excerpts below.

> **P1:** *Women should be mentored in order to build skills that will make them capable leaders who can be relied on.*
> **P7:** *For women to be capable leaders, they need support with leadership mentoring.*
> **P18:** *Quality and intensive mentoring are required to socialise women into senior management.*
> **P21:** *Women leaders: networking and mentoring programmes can equip women to be capable leaders.*
> **P22:** *Leaders are not born, so women should receive support, training, and development programmes.*

4.3.4.1.2 High self-esteem and confidence

A strong conviction was expressed that, at a personal level, women were expected to prove their high self-esteem and confidence in order to progress to senior management positions. The participants believed that women's self-esteem and confidence were crucial. The majority of participants believed that, in order for women to advance into senior management positions, they should display greater self-esteem and performance confidence than men. To assure progression into senior management positions at the ODeL institution of higher education, women's personalities should therefore be primarily geared towards achieving high self-esteem and confidence. The following participant excerpts depict the participants' views in that regard:

> **P2:** *To progress into senior management positions, women should demonstrate higher self-esteem and confidence in their performance than their male counterparts.*
> **P10:** *A personality that reflects determination and courage can help women be promoted to management positions.*
> **P14:** *Possessing high levels of confidence is a prerequisite for eliminating gender inequality at senior management levels.*
> **P19:** *Women should demonstrate higher self-esteem, self-awareness, and confidence in their performance than their male counterparts.*

4.3.4.1.3 Academic excellence

The majority of the participants were of the view that women can progress to senior management positions in large numbers if they have higher-quality educational achievements. In this instance, the participants believe that academic excellence is a prerequisite for progression into senior management positions. In order to attract recognition, women should try to influence the academic environment by working hard towards acquiring appropriate qualifications, which can help them be recognised as capable leaders. In addition, the participants emphasise that the panacea for women's progression is to study hard and then receive support, training and development programmes, as mentioned below.

> **P4:** *Acquiring a Master's degree and vast experience can propel women to senior management positions.*
> **P5:** *Academic excellence, such as attaining a Master's degree or Doctorate, is a prerequisite for women's progression.*

P6*: Academic competence, such as graduating with a Master's, can help women progress to senior management positions.*
P9: *Women should study to make a difference in the academic circles for them to be the debilitating patriarchal norms.*
P11: *Working hard and acquiring suitable qualifications can help women advance in management.*
P12: *Possessing a Master's improves the chances of women being promoted.*
P13: *A competent woman should be a holder of a Master's degree.*
P15: *Women must go to school and study further.*
P16: *The panacea for women's progression is to study hard and then receive support, training and development programmes.*
P17: *Obtaining a Master's degree increases women's chances of progressing to senior management.*

A number of solutions are noted for the obstacles women face when attempting to advance to senior management positions in higher education. The abilities and competencies that women possess can facilitate their progression into senior management roles.

4.3.4.2 Sub-Theme 4.2: Structural changes to be adopted and implemented

Structural changes to be adopted and implemented entailed the following sub-categories: gender equality supportive structures, and mentorship and development structures.

4.3.4.2.1 Gender equality supportive structures

Participants noted that gender equality supportive structures contribute immensely to advancing women to senior management positions within the ODeL institution.

P1: *Gender equality supportive structures should be put in place, and efforts should be made to eliminate traditional gender norms and traditions.*
P3: *The 50/50 ratio gender equality policy should be implemented without any compromise to eliminate the current underrepresentation of women in senior management positions.*
P5: *A gender equity transformation agenda should be instigated in order to discourage male dominance and women's subordination.*
P6: *Gender equity at all management levels, from the lower level to the top level, should ensure equal representation of both genders.*

Participants advocated for this structural change to be embedded and reflected in the ODeL institution's policies, procedures, and processes. In this regard, gender equality supportive structures emerged as the most prominent thematic subcategory of the

structural changes that need to be adopted and implemented to increase the progression of women into senior management positions.

> **P7:** *A review of the current gender policies by the council should be done, and more emphasis should be placed on ensuring a 50/50 representation on all levels.*
> **P8:** *Mentorship biases should be eliminated in order to accommodate women as well.*
> **P10:** *Department heads need to implement their equity policies adequately and fairly.*
> **P12:** *A gender equity audit should be done at all management levels, from the lower level to the top level, to establish the current representation anomalies of both genders.*
> **P13:** *The 50/50 ratio gender equality policy should be reviewed and used to formulate a progressive and balanced institutional power structure.*
> **P17:** *Equity at all levels, from lower level to top level equal number of both genders.*
> **P18:** *Review of policies by involving women on a 50/50 basis.*
> **P19:** *Gender policy changes should be implemented so that more women are accommodated in senior management positions.*
> **P22:** *A gender quota system should be introduced to eliminate patriarchal ideology and oppression of women.*

4.3.4.2.2 Mentorship and development structures

The participants' contributions underscored the structural adjustments that need to be made in order for women and men to progress to senior management positions equally. Women who participated in the study's findings made it clear the importance of gender-supportive systems.

> **P25:** *important senior management roles should also be provided to women - not merely for women to fill the space in order to keep with the gender quota...*
> **P3:** also emphasised… *the need for structures and policies that support a 50/50 progression for both men and women.*

The majority of participants believed that the current underrepresentation of women in senior management positions should be eliminated, and that the 50/50 gender equality policy should be strictly enforced. In order to accommodate more women in senior management positions, participants concurred that gender policies should be modified. Accordingly, the European Commission discovered in 2021 that gender equality plans (GEPs) should be implemented without concessions in order to resolve gender imbalances in higher education institutions. Given the ODeL institution's environment, which served as the context for the current study, the adoption and implementation of

policies that promote women to senior management positions are critical (Moodly & Toni, 2019b).

> **P11:** *Leadership qualities should be groomed in women*.
> **P16:** *Leadership structures should be developed with a particular focus on women occupants of management positions.*
> **P21:** *Supportive structures and mentors are needed for women to be equipped with leadership capabilities*.
> **P23:** *Structures that facilitate the preparation of women for senior management positions have to be put in place*.
> **P24:** *System-wide level structures supporting women in leadership and the promotion of women should be established*.

In the South African higher education sector, the lack of progression of women to senior management roles persists notwithstanding progressive legislation (Toni & Moodly, 2019). Slow policy development and execution to address gender disparities is the root cause of this issue (Gumede, 2020).

The following excerpt shows that there is a need for supportive structures to promote gender equality and women's progression to managerial positions in a way that will produce equal representation:

> **P1:** "... *supporting mechanisms for gender equality should be put in place, and efforts should be made to eradicate established gender norms and practices*..."

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter basically presented and analysed the findings accruing from the researcher's interactions and conversations/ dialogues with the selected participants through the face-to-face interview mode of enquiry. As the primary research instrument, the interviews (see Appendix E) were intended to contribute to the resolution of the research problem (see Section 1.4), the achievement of the research purpose (see Section 1.5.1), as well as the research objectives as articulated in Section 1.5.2. In this regard, the findings were compared to the research objectives and research questions to determine whether or not they were relevant and advance the overall intentions of the study. It was essential to establish and maintain coherence between the research questions and the pertinent literature by matching the interview questions to the research questions. Accordingly, the presentation and analysis of the findings are closely related to the literature and theory discussed in Chapter 2 of this study.

The structure of the chapter enabled a seamless understanding of both the participants' individual characteristics or profiles, as well as their contextually defined viewpoints, understandings, and perceptions regarding the progression or progression of women to senior management and leadership roles or positions in open distance learning institutions in particular, and higher education in general.

The findings themselves were developed and subsequently arranged thematically and in accordance with their respective sub-themes or categories. The participants' verbatim responses were also included in order to reflect the responses that either corroborated or refuted the assertions made in the interview questions. Overall, the findings reflected that women's progression to senior management positions in an ODeL institution of higher education in Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa, is hindered mostly by inherent power structures. The implication is that male patriarchal culture still looms large in society and both private and public organisations. This perspective was also expressed by many scholars and studies in the literature. The following chapter highlights the main findings, recommendations, and conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter presented the study's findings primarily in the context of their experiences, perceptions, and understanding regarding women's progression or progression to senior management positions in institutions of higher education. The current chapter, on the other hand, succinctly presents the principal study findings and study objectives in relation to the existing literature reviewed on the topic of the inherent power structures impeding the progression of women to senior management positions. Further, the chapter describes the study's limitations and proposes appropriate recommendations and corresponding conclusions derived from the study's findings, which were presented in detail in the preceding chapter.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived work experiences of women in management at a selected ODeL institution of higher education in order to gain a better understanding of how this academic institution can dismantle or fragment the inherent power structures and other factors that inhibit the progression of women to senior management and leadership positions or roles. The following objectives were articulated in order to realise the research purpose, as appearing in Section 1.5.1 of Chapter 1:

Objective 1: To explore the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that impede the progression of women to senior management and leadership roles;

Objective 2: To determine the OdeL institution's extent of compliance with the implementation of policies and laws that seek to promote the progression of women to senior management positions within the organisation;

Objective 3: To explore perceptions concerning the glass ceiling that hinders women from progressing to senior positions in higher education management; and

Objective 4: To explore measures needed to enhance women's' chances of progressing to senior management positions at the ODeL higher education institutions .

Four (4) main/ superordinate themes emerged from the findings, all of which addressed the objectives of the study. These themes relate to inherent power structures, institutional compliance with government gender policies and acts, perceptions on the glass ceiling and measures required to enhance women's progression.

5.2.1 Inherent Power Structures

The inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that inhibit women's progression to senior management positions are patriarchal structures, male standards recognition, and gender stereotyping.

5.2.1.1 Patriarchal structures

The findings revealed that patriarchal structures encompass one of the institutionalised. There are power structures within the ODeL that impede the progression of women to senior management positions. The majority of participants demonstrated that the ODeL institution's power structure is steeply patriarchal and male-dominated. In this regard, the majority of participants emphasised that the ODeL institution is governed by traditional patriarchal power structures that are antagonistic to women's progression to higher positions in leadership and management.

One of the participants noted that patriarchy is ingrained within the ODeL institution and is difficult to eradicate, as indicated below:

> **P2**: *Patriarchy ideology is deeply entrenched in the institution; hence, women's progression is regarded with a pinch of salt*.

The majority of participants agreed that patriarchy is the most significant barrier to women's progression to senior management positions, as some of the participants below have stated:

> **P7**: *Patriarchy is the main structure women are battling with recognition in management positions.*
> **P10:** *The patriarchal ideology inherent in the institution perpetuates the myth that women have less intellectual and physical potential than men.*

In the same vein, some participants highlighted that adherence to patriarchal ideology has resulted in the myth that women are incapable leaders as compared to men.

5.2.1.2 Acknowledgement of male leadership standards over women's standards

It emerged that women are failing to progress to senior management positions due to the inherent power structures' endorsement and acknowledgement of male leadership standards over those of women. Traditionally, it is acknowledged that women should prioritise family responsibilities above all other responsibilities outside of the home.

Consequently, women do not necessarily attain the same landmarks as men at the same chronological level.

The majority of women who participated in the study asserted that leadership behaviours are predominantly associated with masculine traits in the ODeL context. In the majority of cases, women have observed that behaviour traits deemed attractive in males are perceived negatively when exhibited by women. According to the ODeL institution's inherent patriarchal leadership structures, women typically exhibit a style of servant-leadership that is ineffective. Because the institution is inherently patriarchal, it appears to be extremely difficult for women to advance to positions of senior management, based on the fact that the institution is inherently patriarchal. According to the majority of the women who participated in the study, the organisation's leadership decision-making process is fundamentally gendered and androgynous. Thus, the participants related and argued that women continue to experience patriarchal structures of masculine values, power, and dominance. The following are some of the participants' narratives.

> **P18:** *Males are still dominating in leadership and management positions despite efforts by the government to push for a 50/50 power structure.*
> **P24:** *There is a deliberate systemic arrangement of sidelining women in senior management positions through inadequate compliance with gender equity laws and policies.*

The majority of participants perceive that there is significant recognition and acknowledgement of male leadership standards over women's feminine standards and characteristics. Participants stressed that male dominance and chauvinistic orientations they are experiencing are the precursors of the glass ceiling to which they are subjected today and day out. In this regard, it emerged that the recognition of male standards of leadership over women's standards is an inherent power structure that impedes the progression of women to senior management positions at the ODeL Institution of Higher Learning.

5.2.1.3 Gendered and stereotyped power structures

In the quest to find solutions to the problem of gender discrimination in the workplace, the researcher noted that there are numerous corrective measures that could be applied, including legislation aimed at achieving an equally represented workforce in South Africa. The majority of participants in this study observed that the ODeL Institution continues to

be plagued by gendered power structures that seek to marginalise women who aspire to advance to senior management positions, as some of the participants mentioned below:

> **P2:** *Not much is done to comply with the law, as few women are appointed to senior management.*
> **P5:** *The will to implement gender equality laws is questionable; therefore, senior management must enforce the policies to ensure compliance with the laws.*
> **P6:** *In my view, there is limited implementation of laws and policies.*

The gendered power structures comprise gender stereotypes and prejudices, which are used as instruments to thwart women's progression into senior management positions. Reading between the lines, it appears as if the majority of the participants were advocating for the elimination and destruction of gendered power structures. These notions or beliefs may or may not be reflective of reality. Gender stereotyping is considered to be a significant issue obstructing the career progressions of women in management (Hentschel et al., 2019). Thus, the participants emphasised the need for the ODeL institution to overlook the issue of gender when progressing both men and women to senior management positions. One of the participants' views is as follows:

> **P1:** *The institution is operating on traditional power structures that do not favour women's progression, and it would take some time to adopt newly defined structures that will open more opportunities for women.*

Gender inequalities within higher education continue because the male gendered leadership is failing to adequately address these inequalities. As a result, gender stereotypes and gender bias greatly impact women's progression to senior management positions (Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2019). Furthermore, culturally assigned gender roles and invisible organisational barriers prevent women from progressing to senior leadership positions in society; hence, the majority of women of a certain culture are expected to be submissive to their male counterparts and are considered 'naturally' unfit for higher positions (Moalusi & Jones, 2019; Stewart, 2020). Both men and women should progress based on merit and capability in doing the assigned job. The majority of the findings were based on the participants' individual experiences as female administrators at the ODeL institution of higher education. In addition, the participants identified a variety of factors at the ODeL institution of higher education that may impede women's progression to senior management positions. The following are the participants' views in that regard:

P8: *Even though we have different experiences in view of the progression of women, I believe as women we still share common views and challenges that hurt us in a similar manner. However, some of our experiences are unique in terms of our personal and professional encounters.*

In general, the participants reported that the authorities should be 'gender-blind' or 'gender-neutral' when promoting potential managers to positions of senior management. The participants identified the elimination of gender prejudices, gender stereotyping, patriarchal tendencies, and the perpetuation of systematic inequality in ODeL institutions of higher education as the most pressing issues to be addressed. Similarly, previous research has demonstrated that higher education institutions continue to be gendered (inherently gender based) and gendering (perpetuating male superiority) organisations (Toni & Moodly, 2019) (see Section 2.6). Similar findings from multiple studies indicate that the number of women in leadership positions in developing countries is not increasing (Mdleleni et al., 2021) (see Section 2.6).

While the concept of a single dominant form of masculinity is increasingly being questioned, patriarchal power structures continue to uphold a social system in which women and the feminine gender remain subservient (Gallagher & Morison, 2019; Shinbrot et al., 2019) (see Section 2.7). Consistently, the structural cultural milieu of the higher education environment has been cited as one of the inherent power structures that contribute to the marginalisation and underrepresentation of women in senior managerial positions in higher education institutions. In this regard, society's patriarchal essence of society perpetuates male dominance in leadership in this regard.

South African women's access to higher education is increasing gradually. However, women still occupy positions primarily in middle management, and progression to senior management positions remains difficult due to the inherent power structures prevalent in higher education institutions (Gallagher & Morison, 2019; Shinbrot et al., 2019), (see Section 2.7). Literature on women's leadership in higher education reflects structural and cultural power structures that impede women's progression to senior management positions.

5.2.2 Institutional Compliance with Government Gender Policies and Acts

According to participants, the comprehensive implementation of the EEA in the ODeL institution of higher education could help to eliminate the inherent power structures that

impede women's progression senior management positions. The participants lamented that the degree to which the ODeL institution complies with the implementation of the EEA regulations is extremely low. The participants' perspectives varied, based on their individual and managerial experience, as indicated in the following statements by some of the participants:

> **P6 and P10:** *We have an employment equity policy, but it simply states that the institution believes in Employment Equity and diversity, but we have no targets for women's representation in management positions. So, this institution should have an employment equity plan and targets specifically for promoting women's progression to senior management positions.*

According to P**6** and **P10** in the above-mentioned statement, employment equity plans and targets were ineffective in promoting women's progression to senior management positions, despite the diversity of perceptions among women in management. Furthermore, these participants acknowledged the connection between employment equity implementation and compliance with the non-discriminatory promotion of women to senior management positions. As a result, the majority of participants were unanimous and unequivocal about the EEA's role in promoting and facilitating women's progression to senior management positions.

Concerns were expressed regarding the fragmented and insufficient implementation of the EEA at the ODeL institution of higher education. A minority of the participants believed that the EEA and the Skills Development Act are the legal instruments used to guide and monitor institutional compliance with gender equality policies and laws in South African organisations.

> **P6 and P10:** *We have an employment equity policy, but it simply states that the institution believes in Employment Equity and diversity, but we have no targets for women's representation in management positions. So, this institution should have an employment equity plan and targets specifically for promoting women's progression to senior management positions.*

The study findings indicate that the institution is governed by laws and policies that promote the progression of women to senior management positions. The majority of participants cited the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998), and the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998), as the governing and monitoring legal frameworks for gender equality in the progression of women. The EEA and the Skills Development Act

are the regulatory instruments that ensure compliance, but neither is tailored to the progression of either gender. The following section addresses compliance and implementation of gender equity laws and policies at the questioned ODeL institution.

Participants were of the opinion that the ODeL institution's implementation of gender equality laws designed to promote women's progression to senior management positions is inadequate. Participants implied that the lackadaisical implementation of gender equity legislation and policies is largely responsible for the limited progression of women to senior management positions. The majority of participants believed that the government should do more through the Department of Labour and the Department of Higher Education to ensure compliance with legal instruments regarding gender equity.

A lack of policy compliance enforcement has been cited as the primary factor preventing women from advancing into senior management positions. The institution was not in compliance with the gender equity 50/50 representation criterion, as there was consistent mention of men who were promoted over the past few years. The EEA and the Skills Development Act were identified by participants as the key legal instruments to be used to assure gender equality in the progression of women at the questioned ODeL institution.

5.2.3 Perceptions of the Glass Ceiling

Participants presented and emphasised a number of contrasting perspectives. The findings revealed that the progression of women to senior management positions is perceived as a violation of, and intrusion into patriarchal norms. In patriarchal societies, women are culturally expected to submit to men. Thus, cultural norms pose a substantial barrier to the progression of women to senior management positions (Kuruppuarachi & Surangi, 2020) (see Section 2.8.3). Following are some of the participants' narratives:

> **P23:** *The glass ceiling for women is a reality due to male-oriented organisational culture and beliefs, which perpetuate discriminatory tendencies against women.*
> **P24:** *The institution's failure to implement policies and obsession with old norms and ideologies water down the desire for women to progress to senior management positions.*

April and Sikatali (2019) aver that the accepted value systems, social conventions, and governing principles influence how organisations manage career progressions, (see Section 2.8.3). Inadequate or non-existent implementation of gender policies that promote

gender equality impedes the progression of women. Particularly, the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998), was cited by participants as a flawed and limiting instrument for women's progression. Women's progression to senior management positions is also hindered by a paucity of mentoring and leadership training specifically designed for women, whose progression to senior management positions is impeded by a lack of leadership mentorship.

Due to inadequate mentorship at the selected ODeL institution of higher education, women face the risk of not being promoted to senior management positions as they lack the necessary guidance to develop into competent managers. According to the opinions and experiences of the participants in this study, there are a multitude of obstacles that impede women's progression and create a glass ceiling. Participants extensively clarified the factors that contribute to women's glass ceiling. Accordingly, all the participants concurred that there are visible patriarchal elements within the ODeL that impede the progression of women. Following are some of the statements made by participants in that regard:

> **P15:** *Senior managers are mostly men who preside over a gendered culture that excludes and marginalises women managers.*
> **P16:** *I think sometimes it's organisational politics and union male dominance influence that resultantly lead to women's marginalisation.*
> **P17:** *Organisational practices promote and define masculine values and behaviours.*

As indicated in the above statements, the majority of participants emphasised that the institutions ingrained patriarchy and visible patriarchal elements have considerably impeded the progression of women to executive positions. The majority of men hold more senior management positions than women due to the fact that women are perceived to be less capable functioning as effective leaders (Mdleleni et al., 2021) (see Section 2.7.2). Women are expected to conform to masculine ideals. A minority of participants reported that visible patriarchal structures incorporate gender preconceptions, beliefs, and norms. Education is crucial to achieving gender equality; however, women in management positions at ODeL continue to face severe discrimination.

Family, media, and social attitudes contribute to the development of gender stereotypes in higher education (Toni & Moodly, 2019). The current study has established a

connection between gender stereotypes and the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions. As a result of gender stereotypes, women are routinely subject to discrimination and have become targets of sexist and racist persecution, according to the study's findings (Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020) (see Section 2.8.2).

According to the study, a lack of women in senior management positions suppresses women's agency and voices. Women's underrepresentation in senior management positions, will increase as a result of feeling will not be expressed and recognised. Very few participants suggested that a lack of women in prominent management positions suppresses women's agency and voices. In this regard, the participants were also of the opinion that the small number of women advancing to positions of senior management should be reduced because it perpetuates the obstruction of government and constitutional gender equality initiatives.

Participants argued that a number of measures should be implemented in an effort to achieve gender parity in senior management positions. Few women occupying senior management positions at the ODeL institution is a regressive management phenomenon that will hinder the development of women leaders. The participants believed that the progression of women to senior management positions was as important as the progression of men to senior management positions.

5.2.4 Measures Required to Enhance Women's Progression

Several competencies and skills are required for women to compete on par with men. Women's progression to senior management positions is hampered by a lack of fundamental leadership competencies and abilities. In addition, some structural modifications need to be adopted and implemented to facilitate the progression of women to senior management positions.

5.2.4.1 Mentorship

Several participants proposed that women in management should be provided with exceptional and quality mentorship to enhance their chances of progressing to senior management positions. These participants recommended that quality and intensive mentoring are required to prepare women for senior management positions through the provision of support, training, and development programmes.

5.2.4.2 High self-esteem and confidence

A handful of the participants had a strong conviction that, at a personal level, women should show that they have high self-esteem and confidence for them to progress to senior management positions. They believed that women's self-esteem and confidence were crucial. The majority of participants believed that in order for women to advance into senior management positions, they needed to display greater self-esteem and performance confidence than men. To ensure progression into senior management positions at the ODeL institution of higher education, women's personalities should therefore be primarily geared towards achieving high self-esteem and confidence.

5.2.4.3 Academic excellence

The majority of the participants were of the view that women can progress to senior management positions in large numbers on the condition that they have higher and higher-quality educational achievements. In this instance, the participants believe that academic excellence is a prerequisite for progression into senior management positions. In order to attract recognition, women should try to have influence in academia by working hard towards acquiring appropriate qualifications, which can help them be recognised as capable leaders. In addition, the participants emphasised that the panacea for women's progression is to study hard and then receive support, training and development programmes.

5.2.4.4 Gender equality supportive structures

Participants noted that gender equality supportive structures play a significant role in enhancing the progression of women into senior management positions at the ODeL organisation. Participants advocated for this structural change to be embedded and reflected in the ODeL institution's policies, procedures, and processes. In this regard, gender equality supportive structures emerged as the most prominent thematic sub-category of the structural changes that should be adopted and implemented to increase the progression of women into senior management positions.

5.2.4.5 Structural adjustments

The contributions of the participants highlighted the need for structural changes in order for women and men to advance to senior management positions on an equal basis. The participants emphasised the importance of gender-inclusive systems. It is essential for

women to have access to senior management positions, not just to fulfil quotas. Participant three also emphasised the need for structures and policies that support a 50/50 progression for both men and women. The majority of participants believed that the current underrepresentation of women in senior management positions should be eliminated, and that the 50/50 gender equality policy should be strictly enforced.

In order to accommodate more women in senior management positions, participants concurred that gender policies need to be modified. Accordingly, the European Commission discovered in 2021 that Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) have to be implemented without concessions to resolve gender imbalances in higher education institutions. Given the ODeL institution's environment, which served as the context for the current study, the adoption and implementation of policies that promote women to senior management positions are critical (Toni & Moodly, 2019) (see Section 2.7.1 in particular).

Women in the South African higher education sector continues to be underrepresented in senior management positions despite the prevalence of progressive legislation (Toni & Moodly, 2019) (see Sections 1.1 and 1.3). The results showed that there is a need for supportive structures for gender equality so that women can progress into managerial positions in a way that produces a 50/50 ratio. Participant 1 asserts that in order to attain equal representation, "... supporting mechanisms for gender equality should be put in place, and efforts should be made to eradicate established gendered norms and practices..."

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

The study uncovered inherent power structures within the ODeL institution of higher education that impede the progression of women to senior management positions. If not managed with circumspect, the challenges associated with the inherent power structures may lead to more women underrepresented in senior management positions. The findings further established that women in management's lived experiences were characterised by patriarchal prejudices; gendered stereotypes; poor implementation of gender equality acts and policies; and the glass ceiling effect.

The women also had to cope with numerous feelings, such as frustration, doubt, hopelessness, buttered self-esteem and pessimism. Additionally, the findings reveal that

most of the women in management engaged in self-retrospection as they sought to find means and ways of upgrading their skills and capabilities and ensured that all policies in favour of a 50/50 representation of women and men were implemented and respected by mostly men in positions of power. The availability of mentorship and leadership development emerged as an excellent opportunity for enabling and equipping women to be capable candidates for senior management positions. The findings may be useful to the ODeL institution of higher education and other institutions of higher education that seek to increase women's progression to senior management positions. Future research may use these findings as a benchmark for gender studies and organisational change.

5.4 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Several potential limitations were identified, as indicated below:

A qualitative method was used, and different results could have been attained with the application of quantitative methods. Although the sample size of twenty-five (25) participants was a reasonable number for the IPA in this study, the results are not necessarily generalisable to all academic institutions of higher learning in Gauteng Province and South Africa as a whole. In addition, only interviews were used for the study, implying that the information gained was solely reliant on the participants' subjective opinions.

The lived experiences and perceptions of women managers involved in the study may be different from those in other higher education institutions in the context of women's progression to senior management positions. The participants from the Sunnyside and Muckleunek campuses were selected. Thus, they may be biased against the inherent power structures on these 2 (two) campuses. For that reason, the findings cannot be generalised to all OdeL campuses and other South African universities, as they may not be facing similar challenges.

In addition, the study's findings are founded on retrospective accounts concerning the progression of women to senior management positions. Memory bias is prevalent in retrospective accounts (Ary et al., 2019). Participants may have also been subject to the social desirability effect, in which they 'police' their responses to avoid negative evaluations by the researcher.

Despite the fact that the study's findings cannot be generalised to the larger population of universities and ODeL institutions, valuable insights into the progression of women to senior management positions are provided, including plausible measures for improvement. Furthermore, when selecting a sample, the study did not consider the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. In relation to female managers, the researcher only considered gender.

The sample was selected using non-probability purposive sampling, and the qualitative nature of the study meant that the results obtained might be biased and have low credibility due to the researcher's *own* judgement as the ultimate dependable variable for choosing participants.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE

This section concentrates on the recommendations derived from the relevant research findings and literature review (Ary et al., 2019). Based on this study's findings and analyses, the following recommendations were made:

5.5.1 Inherent Power Structures

To effect change in the ODeL institution, it is critical to confront and solve patriarchy and gender discrimination. Patriarchy and gender discrimination should not flourish or be encouraged in all institutions. Male gender supremacy in ODeL management positions is toxic, and women endure the most of its negative impact. Structurally, the institution should emphasise accepting diversity, non-discriminatory leadership ideals, and equality in management positions.

In this research, patriarchal standards were identified as a significant barrier to the progression of women to senior management positions. This study also revealed that patriarchy in the ODeL Institution is a hierarchical arrangement of social institutions and social relationships that allows males to hold positions of authority over women. It is necessary to address the obstacles women face at the ODeL institution. The researcher strongly believes that this can be achieved by delegating authority to women in the OdeL institution to make important decisions for their departments and university.

5.5.2 Institutional Compliance with Government Gender Policies and Acts

Based on the findings of this study, higher education policies in South Africa were created with the intention of promoting women to senior management and leadership positions. However, this research raised significant issues and problems surrounding the practical execution of these rules. The findings of this paper indicated that the ODeL institution of higher learning, in collaboration with the necessary stakeholders, should guarantee that gender equality policies are implemented in the institution. According to the researcher, women have tremendous potential to contribute to senior management positions in higher education. In the ODeL Institution, gender equality will be promoted by university administration, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders. The ODeL Institution should implement equitable policies and objectives to increase the number of women in executive positions such as department chairs, deans, and vice-chancellors.

5.5.3 Barriers Hindering the Progression of Women to Senior Management Positions

Women are prevented from advancing to senior management positions by barriers such as stereotyping, bias, poor growth opportunities, and the glass ceiling, indicating unfavourable conditions that could have a direct impact on their progression. The ODeL Institution of Higher Education should identify women who can contribute to the senior management level and mentor them as prospective senior managers and organisational leaders.

5.5.4 Measures Required to Enhance Women's Progression

To ensure their success, the administration of ODeL institutions of higher education should encourage and support women in leadership. The institution should remain receptive to women's expectations in leadership positions and provide the infrastructure necessary for women to advance to senior management positions, thrive in their careers, and produce outstanding results.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter concludes the overall research investigation. The chapter further combined the empirical (primary) findings of the study with prevalent perspectives gleaned from a systematic literature review (secondary data). The study presented both its limitations and recommendations based on the integrated principal findings. These recommendations

are the researcher's own suggestions that may aid the ODeL Institution of Higher Education in promoting the progression of women to senior management positions and boosting the representation of women in senior management. The findings further established that women in management's lived experiences were characterised by patriarchal prejudices; gendered stereotypes; poor implementation of gender equality acts and policies; and the glass ceiling effect.

The women also had to cope with numerous feelings, such as frustration, doubt, hopelessness, buttered self-esteem and pessimism. The inherent power structures within the ODeL Institution of Higher Education were portrayed as the most significant barrier to the progression of women to senior management positions. Without any modicum of circumspection, the challenges posed by the prevailing power structures could result in the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions. Higher education institutions could use these findings to increase the progression rate of women to senior management positions in their respective organisations.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

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UNISA HRM ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 15 November 2021

Dear Ms Mantsha Madiroko Mfopa

Decision: Ethics approval from November 2021 to December 2024

NHREC Registration #: (if applicable)

ERC Reference #:
2021_HRM_006

Name: Ms Mantsha Madiroko Mfopa

Student: #30782473

Researcher(s): Name: Mantsha Madiroko Mfopa
E-mail address, telephone # mfopamm@unisa.ac.za, 012 444 8755

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr Jeremy Mitonga-Monga
E-mail address, telephone # jeremym@uj.ac.za, 011 559 3140

Co-supervisor(s): Name: Mrs Tebogo Molotsi
E-mail address, telephone # molottk@unisa.ac.za, 012 429 4704

Working title of research:
Exploring the progression of women in senior management positions at an open e-learning institution in Gauteng Province

Qualification: Mcom

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa HRM Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for MM Mfopa for a period of **three (3) years**.

The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by a Sub-committee of URERC on 30 September 2021 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The ethics application was approved on 15 November 2021.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. **The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.**
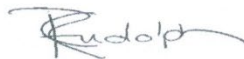
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the HRM Committee.

4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance

8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **December 2024**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2021_HRM_006** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature

Name of the Chair: Dr Elizabeth Rudolph
E-mail: rudolec@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 2586

Signature

Executive Dean: Prof MT Mogale
E-mail: mogalmt@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429-4805

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Exploring the progression of women in senior management positions at an open distance e-learning institution in Gauteng Province

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Mantsha Madiroko Mfopa and I am doing research with University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled 'Exploring the progression of women in senior management positions at an open distance e-learning institution in Gauteng Province'

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

I am conducting this research to gain an insight into the lived work experiences of academic staff members working in a South African higher education institution and to obtain a better understanding of how organisations can use HRM practice factors to retain academic staff members.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate in the research as you are academic who has been working at UNISA for at least five years and I believe you could provide me with valuable information. Approximately ten participants will be invited to participate in the study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves semi-structured interview of not more than 60 minutes. The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recording after written consent to do this had been obtained from you.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Exploring the lived experiences of the academic staff will give deeper insights of the HRM practices that influences the retention of this group of professionals. The outcome of this research could be used to establish how HRM practices affect retention of academics and recommend effective HR practices to management and HR practitioners at HEIs.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorder anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. Please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity, e.g. when focus groups are used as a data collection method.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme after 5-year period has expired.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No payment or reward offered, financial or otherwise.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences at Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact _____ on _____. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact faithntuli@yahoo.com.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact _____. Contact the research ethics chairperson of the Dr Marianne Engelbrecht on engelm1@unisa.ac.za if you have any ethical concerns.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the semi structured interviews. I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: .... (please print)

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

Researcher's Name & Surname: Mantsha Madoroko Mfopa

Researcher's signature: .... Date: 16/06/2021.........

APPENDIX D: PERMISSION LETTER

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RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE (RPSC) OF THE SENATE RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES AND COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)

25 February 2022

Decision: Permission approval 25 February 2022 to 24 February 2023	Ref #: 2022_RPC_010 Ms Mantsha Madiroko Mfopa Student #: 30782473 Employee #:

Principal Investigator:

Ms Mantsha Madiroko Mfopa

Department of Student Registration and Administration

College of Economics and Management Sciences

UNISA

mfopamm@unisa.ac.za; 082 228 3954

Supervisor: Dr Tebogo Kefilwe Molotsoi; molottk@unisa.ac.za; 0834582134

Co-Supervisor: Dr Jeremy Mitongwa-Monga; jeremym@uj.ac.za; 0833358530

Exploring the progression of women in senior management positions at an open e-learning institution in in Gauteng Province

Your application regarding permission to involve Unisa staff, students and data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Committee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 18 February 2022.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study. You may invite women in top, senior and middle management level at Unisa to participate in semi-structured interviews (25 participants). Permission was granted to obtain the staff name, surname, initials, titles and work email addresses of the participants with the gatekeeping assistance of the Directorate of Human Resources. All other identified personal information needs to be provided by the participants themselves. This is in alignment with condition 2 in the POPIA Act.

University of South Africa
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Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be promoted: " Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible."

The personal information made available to the researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) will only be used for the advancement of this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith and it must not be passed on to third parties. The dissemination of research instruments through the use of electronic mail should strictly be through blind copying, so as to protect the participants' right of privacy. The researcher hereby indemnifies UNISA from any claim or action arising from or due to the researcher's breach of his/her information protection obligations.

You are requested to submit a report of the study to the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC@unisa.ac.za) within 3 months of completion of the study.

Note: The reference number **2022_RPC_010** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants and the Research Permission Subcommittee.

Kind regards,

Dr Retha Visagie – Deputy Chairperson
Email: visagrg@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-2478

_____

Prof Lessing Labuschagne – Chairperson
Email: llabus@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-6368

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

B: QUESTIONS RELATED TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study's main purpose is to explore the progression or advancement of women to senior management positions at an ODeL institution in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Accordingly, the specific objectives of the study are:

Objective 1: To explore the inherent power structures in an ODeL institution that impede the advancement of women to senior management and leadership levels or roles.

Question: Which inherent power structures within the organisation impede the progression of women to top management levels?

Question: To what extent are the patriarchal structures affecting the progression of women?

Question: What are the reasons which cause men to progress to top management levels than women? And why are there few women in top management positions as compared to men?

Objective 2: To determine the ODeL institution's extent of compliance with implementation of policies and laws that seek to promote the advancement of women to senior management positions within the organisation.

Question: Which policies and acts guide the institution in enhancing women progression to top management positions?

Question: To what extent is the institution complying with the implementation of policies and acts which seek to promote the advancement of women to top management positions?

Question: Why is the prejudice towards women advancement occurring even though are several acts and policies aimed at correcting inequalities within South African higher education institutions?

Objective 3: To explore perceptions concerning the glass ceiling that hinders women from progressing to senior positions in higher education management.

Question: Which factors do you think obstruct women advancement into top management positions in your institution?

Question: In your opinion what is the root cause of the glass ceiling in your institution? (e.g. recruitment process).

Question: What is the implication of having few women in top management positions?

Objective 4: To explore measures needed to enhance women's' chances of progressing to senior management positions at the ODeL institutions of higher learning.

Question: Which resources or competences should women acquire for them to obtain senior management positions?

Question: What structural changes should be adopted and implemented for women to progress to top management position on 50/50 basis with men?

Question: Do you think policies on gender equity alone can help to address the current level of inequality in top management positions?

EXPLORING THE PROGRESSION OF WOMEN IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS AT AN OPEN DISTANCE E-LEARNING INSTITUTION IN GAUTENG

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APPENDIX G: EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, the undersigned, hereby confirm my involvement in respect of the language and academic editing, technical compliance and research methodology compatibility check for the dissertation manuscript of **Mrs Mantsha Madiroko Mfopa (Student Number: 30782473)** submitted to me as part of her fulfilment of the requirement for the **Master of Commerce (MComm) in Human Resource Management** degree registered with the University of South Africa (UNISA), and entitled:

Exploring the progress of women in senior management positions at an open distance e-learning institution in Gauteng

As an independent academic editor, I attest that all possible means have been expended to ensure the final draft of **Mrs M.M. Mfopa's** dissertation manuscript reflects both acceptable research methodology practices and language control standards expected of postgraduate research studies at her academic level.

In compliance with expected ethical requirements in research, I have further undertaken to keep all aspects of **Mrs M.M. Mfopa's** study confidential, and as her own individual initiative.

Sincerely.

T.J. Mkhonto

BA Ed: North-West University, Mahikeng (1985)
MEd: School Administration; University of Massachusetts-at-Boston, USA, Harbor Campus (1987)
DTech: Higher Education Curriculum Policy Reform, Design & Management; University of Johannesburg (2007)

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Signed: _____   Date: __11 February 2024__
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