

**EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING CAREER MOBILITY OF FEMALE  
ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my cherished family and wonderful friends, whose support has been invaluable throughout this journey. I also extend my deepest gratitude to my mother, Matlala Maria Ramokone, and to my late sister, Matlala Molewane, and my Late Father Peta Mabitse William whom I never had the opportunity to meet nor see them. Your spiritual guidance and presence have supported me every step of the way. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to amazing Dikeledi Pertunia Racheke for support and courage throughout my academic, and also our wonderful Kgotso Dimpho Racheke as she is the blessing from God, she pushed me to this far and motivated me to achieve this Degree. Your unwavering support and encouragement have been invaluable. This work is a testament to your love and strength.

## DECLARATION

I, Daniel Kgahlela Matlala, affirm that the mini-dissertation entitled: **“Exploring Factors Affecting Career Mobility of Female Administrative Staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa”** is an original piece of work authored by myself. This mini-dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Business Administration degree at the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership, University of Limpopo. I also confirm that this work has not been previously submitted for assessment or as part of a degree at any other institution. Moreover, I declare that all required permissions and consents to conduct the research for this study have been obtained.



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16-10-2024

Signature

Date

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Most organisations have programmes that facilitate career mobility among the staff to retain valuable employees. Career mobility is often encouraged by the economic push-and-pull factors, as well as the opportunities available in various organisations. As a result, university administrative staff are also affected by the same economic pull-and-push factors prevailing globally. The purpose of this study was to explore the factors influencing the career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. The review of the literature for this study showed that numerous South African universities have made significant strides towards gender equity. However, a closer analysis of the data reveals that women are often overrepresented in lower-level positions within these institutions. This research was carried out at the Turfloop Campus of the University of Limpopo, located in Mankweng, Polokwane, in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The research used a qualitative approach, using purposive sampling and an interview guide to gather data. Eleven (11) women in administrative roles participated in the study and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the women appointed as administrators at the University of Limpopo. The study revealed significant concerns about the balance of work and home among female administrative staff. The findings indicate a troubling lack of recognition and visibility for female administrative staff within the University. The absence of formal recognition programmes highlights a significant gap in institutional culture, suggesting that efforts to celebrate the achievements of female staff could improve their visibility and encourage a more inclusive environment. In general, the study emphasised the urgent need for the University of Limpopo to implement comprehensive policies that not only promote gender equity, but also actively support the professional growth of female administrative staff. By establishing robust mentoring programmes, improving recognition initiatives, and improving work-life balance provisions, the University can create a more inclusive culture that empowers women to advance in their careers. This transformative approach is essential not only for the individual growth of female staff, but also for the overall success and sustainability of the institution, as diverse leadership is critical to fostering innovation and excellence in higher education.

**Keywords:** career mobility, female administrative staff, and work-life balance

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AAOs	Assistant Officers
AOs	Administrative Officers
PAOs	Principal Administrative Officers
ARs	Assistant Registrars
EEA	Employment Equity Act
B-BBEEA	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act
TCA	Thematic Content Analysis
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union
UASA	United Association of South Africa
UoT	University of Toronto
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Most organisations have programmes that facilitate career mobility among the staff to retain valuable employees. Brown, Hooley, and Wond (2020) describe career mobility as a process of shifting various roles and positions within organisations or in different companies; the mobility could be upward, horizontal, or downward. Kanyumbu and Lourens (2022) suggest that career mobility is often encouraged by the economic push and pull factors as well as opportunities available in various organisations. As a result, university administrative staff are also affected by the same economic pull and push factors that prevail worldwide. The nature of administrative work has also become challenging and demands that individuals be goal-oriented and lifelong learners. Most women find it challenging to become lifelong learners or to occupy administrative senior management partly due to the lack of mentorship.

According to Yavorsky, Keister, Qian and Nau (2019), the major barriers that prevent women from occupying senior management positions are lack of mentors and networks. Some of the challenges are gender biases and the difficulty faced by women in creating profitable networks, and a work and home balance.

Administrative professionals play an important role in the management of a university (Teelken, Taminiau, and Rosenmüller 2021). They are responsible for a university's policies; they often have major decisions to make. A set of competencies and experience, including academic qualifications, and an orientation toward reflection, sensitiveness, and judgment, is needed to carry out their tasks (Yang, Pu, and Guan 2019). The transformation of universities to strategic actors is a key role played by administrative staff such as assistant administrators, administrative officers, principal administration officers, assistant registrars, directors, deputy registrar, and registrar. As they deal with major issues of leadership and strategic direction in the current higher education sector, their role should be given greater attention. However, Yang et al. (2019) notes that most women in administrative posts face several challenges that have resulted in their career stagnation.

Although women are represented in various sectors, they continue to face challenges in advancing their careers. Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) proffer that women continue to be at the bottom of society, although many females are getting more educated and obtaining professional qualifications. Numerous women continue to be subjected to occupational segregation and find it difficult to break through the glass ceilings. Yang et al. (2019) argue that the glass ceiling separates women from the top management position and the professional administrative post. In South Africa, however, governments have actively and systematically been committed to improving women's interests in different areas of life, including career mobility, similar to many countries around the world.

## **1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Statistics SA (2020) stipulates that the average number of women in the senior administration of South African universities is 24%. In the corporate sector, approximately 20% of administrative staff are Caucasian and African women occupy the lowest levels (Kim, Lee and Han 2020). For example, in South African universities, the same trend can be observed as most women occupy the lowest administrative levels. For most women, career mobility is a challenge due to an inability to create a balance between work and family (Peng, Lian, and Zhang et al. 2022).

In some cases, the glass ceiling syndrome prevents women from realising their career aspirations. According to Imadolu, Kursuncu, and Cavus (2020), the term "glass ceiling" describes the obstacles encountered by women striving for promotions to senior roles in formal workplaces, private industries, universities, and other organisations. This phenomenon involves subtle, unseen, and often insurmountable barriers that hinder women's advancement to higher-level positions. The glass ceiling syndrome ignores the previous achievements and abilities of women.

Igiebor (2021) conducted a study that introduced Feminist Institutionalism. The research used a Feminist Policy Analysis Framework to examine the persistent issue of women's underrepresentation in leadership roles. This study focused on both academic and administrative sectors. The framework underscores the importance of analysing policy content to identify areas of omission or marginalisation, which serve as barriers for women and reinforce male dominance.

The analysis of subtle resistance uncovered examples of neglect and marginalisation within gender-related policies at Obafemi Awolowo University and University of Ibadan. These policy shortcomings, marked by the lack of women-focused initiatives, illustrate how formal regulations can hinder the implementation of gender equality measures, thus perpetuating the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within administration.

Furthermore, the study raised questions about the sincerity of university administrations in promoting gender equality, exposing institutional opposition entrenched in gendered societal and cultural norms prevalent in Nigerian academic institutions. This opposition is evidenced by the failure to enforce penalties for noncompliance with gender equality policies, such as gender quota requirements, and the lack of financial resources allocated to initiatives targeting women, thereby perpetuating gender-based power differentials through formal gender regulations (Igiebor 2021).

Most female staff at the University of Limpopo remain at the lower levels of administration for several years compared to their male counterparts, who are easily promoted. However, there is a drive to recruit internal staff in terms of horizontal mobility. This negatively affects the morale of the workforce because employees look for upward mobility because it has economic benefits (Maqsoom, Musarat, Mubbasit, Alaloul, Ashraf, Rabbani, and Shaheen 2023).

Sometimes, when opportunities arise for internal staff members to be promoted, external people from the private sector are recruited, including Administrative Assistant Officers (AAOs), Administrative Officers (AOs), Principal Administrative Officers (PAOs), Assistant Registrars (ARs), deputy registrar, Director, and Registrar positions. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the factors affecting the career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo to fill knowledge gaps.

### **1.3 MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

The goal of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion within universities served as the main motivation for conducting the study titled: "Exploring [the] factors affecting [the]

career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. In the past, there were noticeable gender differences in higher education or universities, notably in administrative jobs, with women often underrepresented in positions of authority.

This study foregrounded gender disparities by thoroughly studying and identifying the different elements that hinder or promote the career mobility of female administrative professionals. Additionally, it supported the overarching objective of gender equity promotion, both within the University of Limpopo and as a role-model for other academic institutions.

In addition, the motivation of the study extended to the well-being and job satisfaction of female administrative staff. Career mobility encompasses not only professional advancement, but also personal growth, development, and overall job satisfaction. An in-depth exploration of the challenges faced by female administrative staff can pave a way for improved working conditions and a more fulfilling work experience. Furthermore, the University of Limpopo, like many other higher education institutions, can greatly benefit from a diverse workforce that represents a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Addressing barriers to career mobility is essential to foster a talented, motivated, and diverse administrative team.

#### **1.4 THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Hancock, Algozzine, and Lim (2021) state that to remain focused and decide the target of the study, it is important that researchers examine their research objectives. This is because a research project is driven by research objectives in its efforts to answer research questions.

##### **1.4.1 Research Aim**

According to Bairagi and Munot (2019), the aim of the research expresses the desire and the goal that a research project must achieve. Therefore, the aim of investigation was stated as follows: "To investigate the factors that affect the career mobility of female administrative staff at University of Limpopo".

### **1.4.2 Objectives of the research**

Bairagi and Munot (2019) state that the research objectives outline what has to be achieved at the end of a study through measurable concepts. Therefore, the objectives of this study were:

1.4.2.1. To investigate the opportunities available for the professional growth of women in administrative positions at the University of Limpopo.

1.4.2.2. To determine the obstacles hindering the career advancement of women administrators at the University of Limpopo.

### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

According to Brandenburg and McDonough (2019), research questions give a clear indication of the steps which researchers would take to answer these questions. Therefore, the research questions raised in the study were:

1.5.1 Which opportunities are available for the professional growth of women in administrative positions at the University of Limpopo?

1.5.2 What are the obstacles hindering the career advancement of women administrators at the University of Limpopo?

### **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study will benefit the existing body of knowledge about women in managerial and secretarial positions by making them aware of the gender imbalance in South Africa. This study provided insights into global research on gender inequality in leadership positions through a literature review. Also important was the broadening and deepening of insight into the unique and specific challenges which women administrators face at universities. This study will benefit the University of Limpopo when reviewing career mobility policies for women. The study might also serve as a springboard for future research projects on women.

### **1.7 CONCEPTS DEFINED IN THE STUDY**

The research identified and defined the following key concepts:

### 1.7.1 Administrator

Bromley and Meyer (2015) define an administrator as a person who leads the activities of another entity and takes responsibility for meeting some objectives through such efforts. The success of administration seems to depend upon three fundamental skills, which are commonly described as Technical, Human, and Conceptual. It would have been too simplistic to claim those skills which are not linked, but there was merit in examining each one individually and establishing them by their very nature. In this study, the definition by Bromley and Meyer (2015) was adopted.

### 1.7.2 Career mobility

According to Akkermans, Spurk, and Fouad (2021), the frequency of promotions within an organisation is a valuable indicator of professional success and mobility as individual employees need to achieve corporate leadership positions. Following an increase in salary, source of advancement, and maturity stage, occupational career mobility is a horizontal switch from one job to another. In this context, career mobility refers to the progression of an employee advancing to a more desirable or higher-level position. In this study, career mobility is defined as the movement of an employee toward improved occupational opportunities.

### 1.7.3 Women's empowerment

Purnamawati and Utama's (2019) study suggests that positive measures to promote an equal treatment of women and men should include the ability to control the self and have reasonable access to different resources in an organisation. Furthermore, organisational policies should promote equal participation as well as equal privileges and responsibilities. In the context of this study, women's empowerment was described as fostering a sense of self-worth among women, enabling them to make their own choices, and supporting their rights to effect social change for themselves and others.

### 1.7.4 Gender recognition

The concept applies to understanding the experiences of people in work, how their subjectivities are shaped, and what types of gendered phenomena exist within

organisations (Alvesson and Billing 2016). In the context of this study, gender recognition meant the personal sense of one's own gender whether female or male.

## **1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE MINI-DISSERTATION**

The structure of the mini-dissertation was formulated as follows:

**Chapter One:** This chapter provided a detailed overview and background of the study. It addressed the problem statement, research objectives, and the significance of the research. Additionally, it outlined the research questions, methodology, and defined the key concepts of the study. The researcher identified the core issue, explained the rationale behind the study, and established the foundation for research.

**Chapter Two:** This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to the study. It highlighted findings from previous researchers on the topic. The aim was to identify existing gaps in the current body of knowledge.

**Chapter Three:** This chapter outlined the methodology, provided a comprehensive overview of the research plan and detailed how researcher aimed to accomplish the objectives of the study. This section discussed the research design, which served as the framework for the study. It provided details about the study area and the population involved. Additionally, it covered the sampling techniques used and the methods employed for data collection.

**Chapter Four:** This chapter presented and analysed the gathered data utilising themes and sub-themes.

**Chapter Five:** This chapter offered suggestions and drew conclusions derived from the study's results and their potential impact.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

It has been noted that South African universities have made considerable progress towards achieving gender equity. However, a detailed analysis of the data reveals that women are predominantly found in lower-ranking positions within universities (Herbst, 2020). The University of Limpopo, like many academic institutions around the world, operates within a dynamic and competitive environment. In this context, understanding the factors that influence the career mobility of female administrative staff is imperative to foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace culture.

Throughout history, women have faced systemic impediments and prejudices that have obstructed their pathways to professional advancement in various sectors, including academia and administration. A study by Kim et al. (2020) emphasises the widespread nature of these obstacles, shedding light on the discrepancies and injustices women still face in their vocational pursuits. The data sourced from Stats SA (2021) further support this phenomenon, illustrating a pronounced gender disparity in managerial roles within the context of South Africa, where men occupy a significant majority of 66.9%, as opposed to women, who comprise a mere 33.1%.

These figures illuminate the persistent presence of gender disparity in workplaces, where women are markedly underrepresented in leadership roles and decision-making capacities. Traditionally, social conventions, cultural norms, and institutional prejudices have sustained barriers that impede the advancement of women's careers and restrict their entry into senior positions. Biased practices such as gender stereotypes, unequal compensation, and restricted networking opportunities have contributed to the side-lining of women in managerial and executive roles.

Although strides have been made towards gender equality, disparities persist, particularly in leadership roles and career progression pathways. Therefore, examining the specific challenges (Naudé 2017), and opportunities faced by female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo was critical to identifying interventions to promote their career advancement.

This study explored the factors influencing career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo in South Africa. It also examined the experiences, perceptions, and aspirations of these women. The research aimed to contribute to the existing literature on gender and careers. Additionally, it sought to provide insights that could inform organisational policies and practices. These insights were intended to promote gender equity and improve career development opportunities within a university setting.

The research used a qualitative approach to collect detailed information on factors that affect career mobility among female administrative staff. The findings of this study were expected to shed light on the unique challenges that female administrative staff face in advancing their careers within the context of the University of Limpopo. Additionally, the research aimed to identify possible strategies and interventions to address these challenges and promote greater career mobility and opportunities for women in administrative roles within the university (Purnamawati and Utama 2019).

## **2.2 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

The South African government plays an important role in promoting gender equality on the job, particularly for African women, through comprehensive legislation and policy frameworks. Legislation, including the Employment Equity Amendment Act of 2013 and the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, requires the provision of equal opportunities. The framework encourages the advancement of women, ensuring their inclusion in leadership positions. It is imperative that the government rigorously enforces these laws to promote meaningful change and ensure that equality is embraced across all sectors.

In 2009, the Ministry of Women, Children, and People with Disabilities was created. This establishment demonstrated a commitment to safeguarding the rights of these marginalised groups. The ministry works to promote equity, equality, and empowerment for women, children, and individuals with disabilities. These goals align with South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (2009). Through these initiatives, the government strives to create a more inclusive and just society where everyone can thrive regardless of gender. Here

are some of the successful strategies or interventions implemented to support career development within the workplace:

### **2.2.1 Employment Equity Act [No. 55 of 1998] and Career Mobility**

The Employment Equity Act (EEA) of 1998 requires institutions, including institutions of higher learning such as the University of Limpopo, to develop policies that ensure a fair representation of specified groups, including women, in the workplace. Researchers might determine whether a university's attempts to comply with the EEA have resulted in actual career progression possibilities for women by examining the career mobility of female administrative personnel. They may also investigate whether women encounter impediments to higher-level employment or are disproportionately represented in lower-level administrative tasks.

### **2.2.2. Skills Development Act [No. 97 of 1998] and Career Advancement**

The Skills Development Act encourages skill development and training opportunities for all employees, including women. Researchers could examine whether administrative workers at the University of Limpopo have equal access to skill building programmes, professional development opportunities, and mentoring activities that promote career growth. They may investigate whether male and female employees have different levels of training participation or access to career-enhancing tools.

### **2.2.3. Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act [No. 53 of 2003] and Gender Representation**

The B-BBEE Act promotes economic empowerment among historically disadvantaged populations, particularly black women. Researchers might examine whether a university's B-BBEE measures effectively address gender imbalances in representation and progression among administrative staff members. They could also examine the effectiveness of enterprise and supplier development initiatives in promoting women-owned enterprises and entrepreneurial activities among women employees.

#### **2.2.4 Protection from Harassment Act [No. 17 of 2011] and Workplace Environment**

The Protection from Harassment Act protects employees from workplace harassment, including sexual harassment. Researchers might investigate whether the institution has effective rules and procedures in place to handle harassment and discrimination, resulting in a secure and supportive work environment that encourages female administrative personnel to advance their careers. They may investigate the incidence of harassment episodes, perceptions of organisational response to complaints, and the impact of harassment encounters on women's career paths.

#### **2.2.5 Basic Conditions of Employment Act [No.77 of 1997] and Work-Life Balance**

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (No.77 of 1997) specifies minimal working conditions, including maternity leave and work-life balance. Researchers might look into whether a university's policies and procedures effectively address the work-life balance demands of female administrative personnel, particularly those with maternity and caregiving responsibilities. They may assess the availability of flexible work arrangements, maternity leave regulations, and support services to manage professional and family obligations, thereby affecting women's career advancement chances.

The above acts are critical components of the legislative framework that promotes women's empowerment and gender equality in South African workplace. They create rights, duties, and methods to combat discrimination, promote equal opportunities, and advance women's economic participation and leadership.

### **2.3 EMPOWERMENT THEORY**

The empowerment theory is a theoretical framework designed to help individuals and communities achieve greater autonomy and agency in their lives (Han 2022). Acknowledging oppression as a pivotal factor contributing to disempowerment, particularly among marginalised populations, the theory attempts to equip individuals and communities with the tools needed to cultivate personal, interpersonal, and political empowerment (Heyi and Golga 2022). It strives to enhance their quality of life

and encourage the identification and transformation of systemic barriers that prevent these groups from fulfilling their respective needs.

The synthesis of the existing literature demonstrates an intricate interaction between empowerment theory and career progression within diverse healthcare settings. The notion of empowerment is multifaceted, incorporating psychological empowerment evidenced by a sense of self-efficacy (Dyke et al. 2023), organisational frameworks that promote autonomy (Slatyer, Coventry, Twig, and Davis 2016), and programmes aimed at nurturing professional growth (Dyke et al. 2023). On the contrary, career advancement is impacted by variables such as professional practice models outlining routes for progression and educational programmes focused on enhancing skills (Dyke et al. 2023).

Furthermore, the empowerment theory plays an important role in analysing the factors that impact the career advancement of female administrative personnel at the University of Limpopo, located in South Africa. Within this context, empowerment is characterised by equipping women with essential resources, supportive relationships, and pathways to navigate and overcome structural impediments, such as gender bias, disparities in educational and training opportunities, and constrained possibilities for professional progression.

Various empowerment strategies can be used to improve a sense of autonomy of female employees in their work and in their work environment. These initiatives are expected to result in improvements in job performance, greater self-assurance, and a deeper understanding of professional growth prospects.

By embracing empowerment paradigms, the university has the potential to allow female administrative staff to assert greater agency over their career paths, thereby strengthening their self-assurance, competencies, and abilities to pursue upward mobility within the organisational framework. Empowerment of female administrative personnel cultivates a workplace culture that embodies inclusion, gender parity, and organisational development, providing benefits both for the individual and the broader university community.

The theory of empowerment provides hope for creating work structures and conditions that are more conducive to workers' personal and professional growth and moving

people out of situations of powerlessness. Empowering female administrative staff is crucial because it allows them to break out of traditional roles, have greater control over what they do, and do more meaningful and satisfying work.

This research examined the correlation between empowerment variables and professional progression among female administrative personnel. The current section presents the context and justification for the investigation concerning the significance of comprehending the determinants that influence the occupational development of this cohort. More specifically, this segment begins with an elucidation of the historical background of female administrative staff and an outline of their vocational mobility.

Subsequently, an analysis of women's empowerment is provided, generally and within the professional domain. Existing literature predominantly concentrates on women's career progression within professional and managerial roles, with limited attention to the advancement opportunities available to women in intermediate positions. Although most workers in the secondary labour market are women, there is a paucity of data on the professional trajectories pursued by women in this sector.

Administrative roles have traditionally served as an entry point into the workforce for numerous women, although avenues for career progression are often constrained, resulting in stagnation within these positions (Redmond et al. 2017). Evidenced by statistics indicating lower career mobility rates for women than men, this research underscores the imperative of understanding the impediments and catalysts influencing career advancement for women in various occupational strata to mitigate the gender wage disparity and foster parity in the labour market.

## **2.4 CAREER MOBILITY OF WOMEN AT UNIVERSITIES**

Career mobility, a concept elucidated by Inkson and Thorn (2010) and Moskal (2020), encompasses the dynamic process of navigating movement and transitions throughout individuals' professional trajectories. This notion expands beyond mere job transitions to encompass a wider array of shifts, including inter-organisational, intra-organisational, and geographic moves.

Career mobility underscores the ability of individuals to progress, adapt and evolve in response to evolving personal aspirations, organisational demands, and external market forces (Patton and Doherty 2020). Within the realm of career mobility,

individuals may pursue various trajectories aligned with their career goals. This could involve vertical progression within a singular organisation, where individuals ascend from lower-level positions to higher-tier roles characterised by augmented responsibilities and decision-making authority (Kim et al., 2020). Alternatively, individuals can opt for lateral transitions within the same organisation, facilitating exposure to varied roles and departments to acquire diverse competencies and experiences. Moreover, individuals may engage in inter-organisational transitions, transitioning between different employers or sectors to explore new avenues for professional growth. These transitions may be motivated by factors such as career advancement prospects, alignment with organisational culture, or the search for an improved work-life balance. Furthermore, individuals may consider pursuing portfolio careers and engaging in multiple concurrent roles or projects spanning diverse organisations or industries to enhance flexibility and autonomy in managing their professional endeavours.

The perspectives mentioned align with comparative studies of two universities conducted by Tessens, White, and Web (2011), as well as Chitsamatanga, Rembe, and Shumba (2018), which focused on female administrative staff's perceptions of development and support in Australian universities. In their investigation that involved a sample of 204 senior female administrators, the authors discovered that professional support was deemed essential for their career advancement because it:

Provided role models for junior administrators.

Provided learning about promotion aspects.

Provided useful training for leadership roles.

Provided training on how to deal with 'bullying' and male dominance.

Encouraged shared learning.

Provided a forum for discussion.

Helped with career planning.

The research conducted by Molotsi (2016) provides information on the career progression experiences of female administrators employed at the University of Limpopo, highlighting the distinct obstacles they encounter in their professional trajectories. A key challenge identified in the study is the influence of familial responsibilities on the advancement of women's careers. The need to manage administrative duties along with caregiving responsibilities and family obligations poses a significant hurdle for many women in administrative positions, which requires them to navigate multiple roles and commitments simultaneously.

The research underscored the need for improved institutional support and adaptable policies that meet the diverse requirements of female administrators, encompassing provisions for parental leave, childcare assistance, and initiatives that promote work-life balance. Furthermore, the study uncovered a perceived deficiency in leadership development opportunities among female administrators, which substantially impedes their career progression. Without access to structured leadership training programmes or mentorship initiatives, women face challenges in attaining the skills, knowledge, and self-assurance essential for assuming leadership positions within the university context. To address this issue, Molotsi (2016) advocates establishing customised leadership training schemes to the specific needs of female administrators, equipping them with the essential tools and resources to excel in leadership roles.

Notwithstanding these challenges, Molotsi's (2016) study underscores the crucial role of family backing and individual commitment in facilitating the career advancement of female administrators. Supportive spouses, family members, and peers are essential in enabling women to navigate the intricacies of administration while pursuing their professional aspirations. Additionally, the research underscores the resilience and resolve demonstrated by female administrators in overcoming obstacles and securing advancement opportunities, highlighting their dedication to personal and professional development.

Taking into account these findings, Molotsi (2016) advocates the establishment of supportive frameworks and initiatives to reinforce the career progression of female administrators at the University of Limpopo. This includes the implementation of leadership training programmes, mentoring schemes, and institutional policies that

promote gender equality and work-life balance. By addressing the distinct needs and obstacles of female administrators, the University can establish a more all-encompassing and supportive environment that nurtures their professional growth and progression.

## **2.5 PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION**

Various factors influence perceptions towards women in administrative positions. Neoliberal feminist thoughts have shaped arguments for gender parity and numerical representation in African universities (Tsverukayi 2023). However, there is an increasing critique of the dominant influence of Western feminism and a call for the decolonisation of universities. Alternative feminist perspectives, including decolonial feminism and care ethics, are being examined to gain insight into how women administrators react to and challenge gendered policies and university structures (Moodly 2022). Men in leadership positions in South African universities have been found to have a limited understanding of the challenges experienced by women and the impact of patriarchal and institutional culture on women's lived experiences (Moskal 2020).

In Uganda, the leadership identity of female university leaders is shaped by several factors. These include personal traits and past experience in administrative leadership. Family history also plays a role, along with the influence of mentors and role-models (Shaukat, Shahzadi, and Yousaf 2021). Women trailblazers in higher education leadership possess leadership styles, the appropriate skill set, education and training, activism and collaboration, reliance on role-models and mentors, ambition, and embodiment of spiritual values (Redmond et al. 2017). Stereotypical views and prejudices toward women as leaders in higher education institutions affect their opportunities to demonstrate their leadership roles.

According to Bracken, Allen, and Dean (2023), women managers often face the dilemma of feeling compelled to accept additional assignments to prove their competence. This pressure comes from a pervasive belief that women must continually demonstrate their abilities by taking on increasingly heavier workloads. Women face additional obstacles in their professional journey, such as having to exert themselves doubly to establish their competence and merit for positions or promotions.

Similarly, the study by Awung (2019) discovered that

Participants in the study reported experiencing gender bias, stereotypes, and misconceptions about their leadership abilities despite proven competence.

Organisational politics was prevalent, irrespective of the accomplishments of the participants.

Career women faced a significant role overload due to childbearing, domestic responsibilities, and family commitments.

Women at the University of Toronto (UoT) continue to face unconscious career advancement challenges.

Despite challenges, women demonstrated resilience, courage, and self-reliance.

Women's abilities and efforts were found to significantly impact their career progression.

Family support and mentorship were crucial factors that helped women advance.

Recommendations were proposed for management, career women and future researchers to address these challenges effectively (Awung 2019).

The findings of the above study by Awung (2019) reveal persistent gender biases and stereotypes affecting women's leadership opportunities, alongside challenges such as role overload stemming from familial responsibilities. Despite their proven capabilities, women at UoT continue to face unconscious career advancement hurdles. However, the findings also illuminate the remarkable resilience and self-reliance of these women, underscoring the importance of individual determination in overcoming barriers. Moreover, the research emphasises the important role that support systems, such as family and mentorship, play in promoting women's career advancement. Ultimately, the study calls for ongoing research and concerted efforts from organisational leaders and individuals to address these systemic challenges and promote gender equity in academia and beyond.

## **2.6 OBSTACLES HINDERING THE CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS AT UNIVERSITIES**

In South Africa, much like in numerous other regions globally, women are still working toward achieving equal representation and opportunities across different sectors, including higher education administration. While significant progress has been made in promoting gender equality, women in administrative positions within universities still face numerous challenges that hinder their professional advancement. Although a transformation agenda is established, the higher education sector in South Africa continues to face significant challenges in achieving transformation. Common issues include the glass ceiling, institutional cultures, work-life balance, limited workplace flexibility, a lack of role models and mentors, gender stereotypes in leadership styles, and administrative structures (Awung 2019).

The examination of impediments to women's ascent into leadership positions is a multifaceted and intricate discourse within administrative literature, showcasing diverse viewpoints, discussions, and counterarguments. A key theme that is often examined is the idea of the "glass ceiling," which represents the invisible but significant obstacles that obstruct women's advancement to higher levels of leadership within organisations. This metaphor emphasises the entrenched and often unseen obstacles that hinder women's advancement, notwithstanding their qualifications and competencies. The presence of the glass ceiling indicates ingrained gender prejudices, systemic inequalities, and societal norms that restrict women's opportunities to access leadership roles (Redmond et al. 2017). Furthermore, administrators and researchers investigate instances of partiality and bias ingrained within organisational frameworks and decision-making processes, presenting significant challenges to women's advancement in leadership roles.

Studies highlight systemic gender biases embedded in recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation procedures, where women can face unfair treatment, stereotypes, or exclusion based on their gender. These biases not only diminish women's prospects for career progression, but also perpetuate disparities in leadership representation and organisational climate (Awung 2019).

Moreover, scholarly literature scrutinises the concept of a 'chilly culture' prevalent in numerous workplaces, marked by antagonistic or unsupportive attitudes toward women in leadership positions. This cultural phenomenon could materialise in subtle forms of discrimination, micro-aggressions, or opposition to female authority, creating a complex environment for women to navigate. The chilly culture erodes women's confidence, compromises their leadership effectiveness, and contributes to their marginalisation in decision-making processes and organisational dynamics (Heyi and Golga 2022).

As researchers investigate and dissect these multifarious obstacles to women's leadership, they recommend a variety of interventions and tactics to combat gender disparities and foster women's progression in leadership roles. Suggestions include instituting diversity and inclusion initiatives, nurturing mentorship and sponsorship programmes for aspiring female leaders, challenging implicit biases through awareness and training, and advocating for organisational policies that foster gender equality and endorse work-life balance (Shanafelt et al. 2012; Awung 2019; Patton and Doherty 2020). By engaging in ongoing discourse and research on these intricate issues, scholars contribute to furthering understanding and propelling constructive change toward enhanced gender equality and inclusivity in leadership positions.

### 2.6.1 Work-Life Balance

The quest for work-life balance among career women is multifaceted and spans various professions but is particularly pronounced in demanding fields such as administration. Support from the institution to achieve work-life balance is essential for female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo, as it helps them effectively juggle their professional duties with personal commitments and priorities. A study revealed that educating administrators on the issue of work-life balance is important (Wright 2014). However, some participants shared that they were unsure of how to do this, as evinced by the question raised by one of the participants, 'How do you teach someone to be empathetic and sympathetic to the needs of women?' It seems logical that administrators would desire to seek and understand their needs if most of the employees on any given campus are female.

### 2.6.2 Societal factors

Societal factors encompass broader social, cultural and economic influences shaping the career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo. These factors extend beyond the confines of the institution itself and include societal norms, attitudes, and structural inequalities that can affect women's opportunities for career advancement. Women in administrative leadership positions are faced with social barriers as far as issues of gender roles are concerned. Koenig and Eagly (2014) argue that people's beliefs about women in administrative leadership positions are associated with their normal social roles.

The socialisation process consists of the transition of a child into an individual who observes and respects his or her community's standards, regulations, and practices, as Naude (2017) argues. As a result, individuals behave in distinctive ways when they become part of the group (Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci, and Burke 2017). According to Van Knippenberg (2020), these behaviours are being implemented and reproduced to strengthen or protect the perceived common identity of groups, an inherent form of division from other groups. In this way, behaviour contributes to maintaining the status of social groups in part through de facto blocking outsiders from access because it makes their leaders more easily able to control a population or have resources and established hierarchies (Coetzee 2017). As noted by Bosch (2017), gender is a particularly common and powerful characteristic among various social group identities.

By understanding and addressing these sociocultural concerns inside and outside of the University of Limpopo, stakeholders can help create a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive environment for the advancement of the career of administrative staff. A collective effort to challenge gender stereotypes, promote diversity and inclusion, and address systemic injustices helps develop a culture of empowerment and opportunity for women in the institution and in society.

### 2.6.3 Institutional factors

Women are often paid less than men for the same work, which can limit their financial stability and reduce their incentive to invest in their careers. According to Bohren,

Vogel, Hunter, and Lutsiv (2015), childbirth punishment continues to be an issue in many countries because women are still obliged to take care of themselves and go to work immediately after giving birth. Women who become mothers are perceived to have a lower level of competence in and commitment to their work. Therefore, they are more likely not to be employed or promoted. Steyn and Jackson (2015) confirm that the highest number of barriers to women's participation in school leadership is rooted in an unfavourable attitude towards organisations that have hired women. When selecting employees for managerial positions based on negative stereotypes, some organisations are prone to segregate women.

Institutional policies and practices that encourage workplace flexibility, such as lithe working hours, telecommuting possibilities, and family-friendly regulations, are critical for advancing women's careers (Popovici, Popovici, 2020, Chatterjee, Chaudhuri, and Vrontis 2022). These efforts address the different demands and duties of female administrative workers, allowing for better engagement and retention in the workplace.

By addressing these institutional factors and implementing supportive policies, practices, and initiatives, the University of Limpopo can create a more conducive environment for female administrative staff's career mobility and advancement. Recognising and mitigating barriers while leveraging opportunities for women's professional growth contributes to fostering a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organisational culture.

#### 2.6.4 Personal factors

A woman should lock herself in a glass cage instead of standing in front of a glass ceiling. Individual factors are related to women's expectations and values regarding career goals and opportunities (Bimba and Kaliyamoorthy, 2017), and women are said to be influenced, not only by corporate culture, but also by organisational culture. Men are less motivated because they take risks and underestimate their capabilities. Men have opportunities, but women are still at home and taking care of children in most families. This is due to traditional gender roles and affects women's career aspirations. Women may face barriers to entry into fields dominated by men. Because they rarely see role-models and leaders like themselves, they tend to imagine themselves in these roles, which can still be difficult. Despite gender equality and empowerment,

household units still have traditional structures in which men are the dominant sex (Mofokeng 2021).

Researchers can acquire a full knowledge of the dynamics driving the career mobility of women who are part of the administrative personnel by taking these personal aspects into account and organisational and systemic impacts. Identifying and addressing barriers and enablers at both personal and institutional levels is important. This approach can help create a more inclusive environment. By doing so, it supports women's career advancement within the university setting.

## **2.7 OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OF WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION POSITION**

The imperative of promoting gender equality has become a prominent policy mandate within university administrators. According to Benslimane and Moustaghfir (2020), due to persistent disparities in the representation and advancement of women versus male scholars and administrators across hierarchies, university authorities are tasked with formulating operational plans to facilitate the systematic incorporation of remedial mechanisms for mitigating and eradicating gender-based prejudices within their establishments. Higher education institutions have substantial influence in advancing gender parity and inclusivity, as evidenced by the discernible progress achieved over the past two decades in cultivating a more diverse and proficient cohort of female professionals within academia and the broader employment arena (Benslimane and Moustaghfir 2020).

Implementing policies and initiatives to promote gender equality among early career and postdoctoral researchers remains incomplete in various research-performing institutions (Holzinger, Schiffbänker, Reidl, and Hafellner 2018). Some institutions do not prioritise postdoctoral researchers as a key demographic for career advancement strategies and gender equality policies. Alternatively, in certain organisations, these initiatives are tailored exclusively towards individuals identified as high potentials, disproportionately benefitting a select group of predominantly male researchers, with limited access for most researchers, including female counterparts (Garca-Holgado et al. 2020; Holzinger et al. 2018).

For example, Bothwell (2022) discusses a comprehensive strategy in their report aimed at assisting universities in tackling gender inequality. The report emphasises the importance of inclusive approaches that engage the entire university community, moving beyond isolated 'women in STEM' efforts to promote women's advancement in all academic fields. It recommends that universities go beyond compliance with national regulations and actively promote autonomy and innovation in their gender equality initiatives. Effective communication and implementation of policies and services are deemed critical, and regular evaluations are needed to ensure continued relevance and efficacy in addressing changing circumstances and requirements.

Here are some of the recommendations from Bothwell's (2022) report for universities on how to tackle gender inequality:

Developing a comprehensive approach to tackling gender inequality.

Involve the entire university community.

Move beyond focusing on 'women in STEM'.

Introduce more initiatives focusing on the progress and success of women.

Go beyond national policies and laws.

Ensure that policies and services are widely communicated and implemented.

Regularly review gender equality policies.

## **2.8 IMPORTANCE OF CAREER MOBILITY FOR FEMALE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF**

Female staff members holding administrative positions and aiming for career advancement may face a challenging decision regarding transitioning to an official administrative role or taking on faculty line management responsibilities. The latter is commonly perceived as a key step towards administrative leadership, entails significant decision-making and managerial duties (Martn-Pea, Cachón-Garca and De Vicente y Oliva 2023). However, such roles often involve temporary contracts and are susceptible to being discontinued due to financial constraints. Re-entering

administrative roles after serving in faculty line management may pose challenges, highlighting the comparatively insecure nature of pursuing a career trajectory through faculty line management. Opting for an official administrative position could strategically benefit both male and female professionals aspiring for career progression, enabling them to develop leadership and decision-making competencies. This divergence in career paths between men and women becomes apparent as they navigate opportunities for career mobility within higher education institutions.

Undoubtedly, the importance of career mobility for female administrative staff within the realm of higher education cannot be overstated. Consistent with the empowerment theory, the ability to rise within an organisational hierarchy is essential for promoting a sense of empowerment in the workplace (Redmond et al. 2017). Thus, any advances in the career trajectories of female administrative staff members in higher education deserve the attention of scholars and practitioners of the empowerment theory.

A distinct gendered occupational landscape emerges within colleges and universities, with women predominantly clustered in lower-tier administrative support roles (Lwesi, 2019; Heyi and Golga 2022). Often labelled as “accidental administrators,” females find themselves undertaking roles demanding leadership and management skills, albeit without formal administrative classification. On the contrary, their male counterparts are more prevalent in higher-level administrative positions, signifying a higher degree of career mobility (Igiebor 2021). This disparity may be attributed to the formal recognition of these positions as official administrative roles within the organisational structure of higher education institutions.

According to Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard and Newman (2017), it is imperative for institutions to engage both men and women in addressing gender disparities that negatively affect society. Consequently, decision-makers within tertiary education should purposefully:

- Support the growth of potential female leaders.
- Create opportunities specifically for them.
- Develop clear pathways for their advancement.
- Implement formal support systems, such as leadership initiatives and structured mentoring programmes.

- Encourage and facilitate women's involvement in these frameworks (Redmond et al. 2017).

Guided by Redmond et al. (2017), the University of Limpopo emphasises the importance of developing prospective female leaders among its students. The organisation finds promising female employees through proactive initiatives such as talent identification programmes, performance reviews, and leadership assessments, which provide opportunities for growth and progress. By providing skill-building workshops, professional development seminars, and leadership training programmes, the institution provides these women with the skills and confidence they need to assume leadership positions and responsibilities.

The University of Limpopo can also implement flexible work arrangements, such as flexible hours, compressed workweeks, or telecommuting options, to accommodate the diverse needs and schedules of female administrative staff. Flexible arrangements allow employees to balance better work and personal commitments, including caregiving responsibilities or pursuing further education. Therefore, by implementing some of these strategies, institutions can create an environment where both men and women have equal opportunities to thrive professionally while maintaining a fulfilling personal life.

This has the potential to benefit individual faculty and staff members and contributes to a more inclusive and productive university community. Bracken, Allen, and Dean (2023) noted that leadership development initiatives for women remain essential in educating and supporting female professionals in higher education, aiding them in preparing for, achieving, and sustaining influential roles within their institutions. The primary goal is to equip more women for leadership roles in higher education. This involves enhancing their aspirations and developing essential skills and competencies. Additionally, it focuses on connecting them with mentors and coaches. The University of Limpopo shows its commitment to the well-being and professional achievement of female administrative employees by introducing institutional support measures for work-life balance. These activities help create a more inclusive, supportive, and sustainable work environment in which people can prosper personally and professionally.

## **2.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

The review of the literature on factors that affect the career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa, reveals several critical findings. First, existing research highlights the importance of various factors influencing career mobility, including organisational culture, gender biases, limited access to training and development opportunities, lack of mentorship and support systems, and personal factors such as family responsibilities. These factors interact in complex ways, which affects the career trajectories of female administrative staff within the university setting.

In addition, the literature emphasises the importance of addressing systemic barriers to career advancement faced by female administrative staff. Studies consistently identify organisational culture as a significant determinant of career mobility, with barriers such as gender biases and limited opportunities for professional growth hindering women's progress within the university hierarchy. The absence of formal mentorship programmes and support structures further exacerbates these challenges, limiting the ability of female administrative staff to navigate their career paths effectively. Furthermore, gaps in existing research point to the need for more comprehensive studies that specifically focus on the experiences of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo.

Although there is some research on gender disparities in academia in a more general way, there is a lack of specific attention to the unique challenges administrative staff face in this context. Future investigations could explore the intersectionality of factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background in shaping career mobility outcomes for female administrative staff at the university. Addressing career mobility issues for female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo is paramount to promoting gender equality and fostering a more inclusive organisational culture. By implementing targeted interventions such as mentoring programmes, leadership development initiatives, and policies that promote work-life balance, the university can create a supportive environment conducive to the professional advancement of female administrative staff. Recognising and addressing these challenges is essential to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within the university community and to ensure

equal opportunities for all staff members to thrive in their careers. In chapter 3, the methodological considerations and processes are discussed.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to conduct the study. The methodology adopted a qualitative and exploratory approach to investigate the factors influencing career mobility among female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. This involved conducting semi-structured interviews with individual participants, including, Administrative Assistants (AAs), Administrative Officers (AOs), Principal Administration Officers (PAOs), Assistant Registrars (ARs), and Directors. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was utilised as the primary method for data analysis. TCA is defined as a technique for subjectively interpreting textual data by systematically classifying and identifying themes or patterns, as outlined by Ramoshaba and Singwane (2023). Through TCA, themes were elaborated upon by interpreting the in-depth experiences of participants. The methodology ensured the validity and reliability of inferences drawn from the data through systematic and transparent procedures. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research design and methodology employed to achieve the study's objectives.

### **3.2 RESEARCH METHOD**

According to Busetho, Wick, and Gumbinger (2020), research method refers to the specific procedures or techniques used to collect, analyse, and interpret data in a study. This study adopted the qualitative method to realise the aim, which was to investigate the factors that affect the career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo. Thus, by adopting the qualitative methods, this analysis ensured a deep, holistic understanding of the barriers and enablers of career mobility for female administrative staff, which are critical for informing actionable policy recommendations.

### **3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Kamal (2019) maintains that a research paradigm is a framework or system of beliefs and assumptions that guides how research is conducted. It reflects the researcher's worldview and influences the choice of methods, tools, and approaches used to collect and analyse data.

In this study, the researcher selected the interpretivism paradigm because it emphasises understanding the subjective meanings and experiences of individuals. This aligned with the study's aim to investigate the personal and institutional factors affecting career mobility from the perspective of female administrative staff. Career mobility is influenced by social constructs such as gender roles, organisational culture, and societal expectations (Alharahsheh and Pius 2020; Maree 2019). Therefore, it was through using the interpretivism paradigm that the researcher could ultimately know the real causes of career mobility or immobility from the perspective of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

According to Yin (2014), the research design serves as a strategic roadmap, guiding the progression from initial inquiry to ultimate conclusions. The “here” of a research project represents the starting point, often characterised by a set of questions to be addressed, while the “there” component signifies the destination, encompassing the conclusions drawn from these inquiries. Oliver (2016) similarly emphasises that the research design outlines the practical organisation of the entire research endeavour. In this study, a qualitative approach was employed to investigate the factors influencing the career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. Therefore, a case study design was adopted. A case study allows for an in-depth examination of the specific factors influencing career mobility among female administrative staff within the unique context of the University of Limpopo. Career mobility involves multiple, interrelated personal, institutional, and societal factors. A case study design is ideal for capturing the complexity of these dynamics (Smith 2022).

### **3.5 AREA OF STUDY**

The study took place at University of Limpopo, Turfloop Campus, located in Mankweng, within the Capricorn area of Polokwane. This institution is in the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

**Figure 1.1. Map of Mankweng area**



### **3.6 POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

A sample was drawn from population of the University of Limpopo women in administration positions in the two faculties, namely; Humanities and Management and Law. The following comprised the population of the study, the Assistant Registrars (ARs), Principal Administrative Officers (PAOs), Administrative Officers (AOs), and Administration Assistants (AAs). The target population of the study was fourteen (14) participants.

### **3.7 SAMPLING METHOD AND SIMPLE SIZE**

A sampling method refers to the systematic process of choosing a subset of individuals or elements from a larger population for research. Cardano (2020) states that the primary goal of sampling is to secure a representative sample that accurately reflects the characteristics of the population under study. This representation allows researchers to make valid inferences or generalisations about the entire population based on the attributes of the sample.

In this study, a non-probability sampling method was employed. Vehovar, Toepoel, and Steinmetz (2016) delineated non-probability sampling as a technique devoid of random participant selection, where the likelihood of any specific individual being included in the sample remains unknown. Non-probability sampling encompasses

various methodologies such as convenience sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and quota sampling. The study adopted purposive sampling and eleven (11) participants were sampled to participate because of their knowledge and experience.

### **3.7.1 Ensuring Reliability**

Reliability in this study was enhanced by using recorded interviews, which allowed for the accurate capture of participants' responses. Recording the interviews ensured that no details were overlooked during the data collection process, providing a consistent and verifiable record of the conversations (Rowlands 2021). To further ensure reliability, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were cross-checked against the recordings for accuracy. This approach minimised errors and ensured consistency across the data analysis process.

### **3.7.2 Establishing Validity**

The use of recorded interviews strengthened the study's validity by enabling a detailed and precise examination of the data. Content validity was ensured by designing interview questions informed by existing literature on career mobility and by consulting experts to verify their relevance (Wong 2021). Construct validity was supported by aligning interview questions with theoretical concepts such as career progression and workplace dynamics. Additionally, participants were encouraged to review their transcripts or summaries, ensuring that their responses were accurately captured. Triangulation was also employed, as the recordings provided a rich dataset that could be analysed alongside other sources, such as organisational documents.

### **3.7.3 Promoting Verisimilitude**

Verisimilitude was achieved by using recorded interviews to capture the participants' experiences in their own words, allowing for detailed and novel analysis. The recordings preserved the tone, emotion, and context of the conversations, adding depth and authenticity to the findings. Direct quotes from the transcripts were included in the results to ensure participants' voices were represented accurately. Furthermore, sharing preliminary interpretations with participants enabled them to validate the credibility of the findings and confirm that they reflected their lived experiences.

### **3.8 DATA COLLECTION**

This study adopted a qualitative approach, which is particularly well-suited to exploring complex social phenomena such as career mobility among female administrative staff. Qualitative research allows for a rich, detailed understanding of participants' lived experiences, enabling the researcher to capture the nuanced factors that quantitative methods might overlook. As Kalu and Bwalya (2017) note, qualitative approaches are especially valuable for exploratory studies, as they aim to investigate problems that have not been thoroughly examined, providing a foundation for future research.

The exploratory nature of this study was grounded in the lack of prior research specifically focusing on the factors influencing career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo. By using qualitative methods, the study sought to uncover deep insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by these individuals, offering context-specific findings that contribute to the broader literature on career mobility and gender dynamics in higher education.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method for this study. These interviews involve one-on-one conversations between the researcher and participants, guided by a set of open-ended questions while allowing for flexibility to explore emergent themes. This format strikes a balance between structure and adaptability, making it particularly appropriate for exploratory research.

The choice of semi-structured interviews was informed by the need to capture detailed, personalised accounts of participants' experiences and perspectives. Unlike structured interviews, which follow a rigid question format, semi-structured interviews allow participants to elaborate on their responses, providing richer data and deeper insights. At the same time, the use of a guiding framework ensured that key topics related to career mobility were systematically addressed across all interviews.

### **3.9 DATA ANALYSIS FOR THE QUALITATIVE PHASE**

In the qualitative approach, data analysis utilised Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). This method involves interpreting textual data subjectively by systematically classifying and identifying themes or patterns, as noted by Roller (2019). Through TCA, the researcher elaborates on themes by analysing the in-depth experiences of

participants. To ensure the validity and reliability of the inferences drawn, TCA employs a structured and transparent process for data analysis. These systematic procedures help maintain accuracy throughout the research. These procedures are essential for maintaining the integrity of the analysis. The subsequent steps, adapted from Neuendorf (2018), were implemented while using TCA:

### **3.9.1 Familiarisation with the data**

In qualitative research, the process of data familiarisation and transcription is pivotal for ensuring the credibility and accuracy of the study's findings. Initially, researchers immerse themselves in the data by thoroughly reviewing all collected materials, such as interview recordings and field notes. This comprehensive engagement allows for the identification of emerging patterns and themes, providing a foundational understanding before formal analysis begins. As noted by Dlamini et al. (2023), transcription serves as an interpretative act, facilitating deeper insight into the data.

Following familiarisation, the data is transcribed verbatim into written form (Locke, Feldman, and Golden-Biddle 2022). This meticulous transcription captures, not only the participants' spoken words, but also non-verbal cues and contextual nuances, which are essential for accurate interpretation. Ensuring high-quality transcription involves rigorous training of fieldworkers and systematic review processes. For instance, in their study, Dlamini et al. (2023) emphasised the importance of training fieldworkers in effective interviewing and transcription techniques, as well as conducting multiple reviews of the transcripts by supervisors and independent colleagues to verify accuracy and representativeness.

By engaging deeply with the data during the familiarisation phase and implementing a thorough transcription process, researchers uphold the integrity of the qualitative analysis. These steps are crucial for producing credible and trustworthy findings that authentically represent the participants' experiences.

### **3.9.2 Generating initial codes**

After becoming familiar with data, researcher created a list of ideas. The next step was to generate initial codes from the data. These codes emphasised certain aspects that were particularly interesting to analyst and represented fundamental elements of raw

data. Subsequently, all relevant data extracts were coded and organised within each code.

### **3.9.3 Searching for themes**

After all data was coded and compiled, the various codes were sorted and organised into potential themes. The relevant coded data extracts were then grouped under the identified themes. The researcher analysed the codes and considered how different codes could be combined to form cohesive themes. Finally, the themes were categorised into main themes and sub-themes.

### **3.9.4 Reviewing themes**

Themes that emerged from the data were subsequently reviewed and refined. Each collated extract for every theme was read and evaluated to determine if they formed a coherent pattern.

### **3.9.5 Defining and naming themes**

Themes were defined and refined further. This process included identifying fundamental essence of each theme. Additionally, it involved determining the specific aspects of data that each theme represented.

### **3.9.6 Production of the report**

The researcher conducted a final analysis and prepared the report, specifically analysis for the mini-dissertation. In this report, the researcher presented a concise, coherent, and logical narrative that was engaging and avoided repetition, grasping the core meaning of the data both within individual themes and across multiple themes.

## **3.10 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

In qualitative research, examining trustworthiness is essential for ensuring reliability. To maintain reliability throughout the study, two concepts were adapted from Tassé, Schalock, Balboni, Spreat, and Navas (2016).

### **3.10.1 Credibility**

To ensure credibility in this study on factors affecting the career mobility of female administrative staff, several strategies were employed. Following Tassé and Schalock et al. (2016), the research used well-established qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews informed by relevant literature and expert consultation, to ensure methodological rigour. Participant debriefing sessions were conducted after interviews, allowing respondents to confirm and clarify their contributions. Rich, detailed descriptions and direct quotes from participants were included to capture the complexity of their experiences authentically. Triangulation of data from interviews and organisational documents strengthened the findings' robustness, while prolonged engagement with participants and reflexive practices ensured a nuanced and trustworthy analysis. These efforts provided a credible representation of the participants' perspectives and experiences.

### **3.10.2 Confirmability**

The researcher was aware of his beliefs and assumptions and ensured that they did not affect research process. They also recognised shortcomings in research methods and their potential effects and minimised them; for instance, administrator bias, which meant that he had to conduct a focus group discussion in as similar a manner as he could (Tassé and Schalock et al. 2016). Rehman and Alharthi (2016) suggest that a researcher's perception of validity and their choice of paradigm assumptions can influence validity. To enhance validity in the study, the researcher took the following steps:

Gave a description of method used and the way the data were collected to allow comparison with existing studies.

Mentioned the number of participants in the study (sample size) and the number of researchers involved in the study (in this case, one researcher conducted the study with guidance from a supervisor).

The length of the interviews was also given.

### **3.11 BIAS**

In this study, the followings were ensured to minimise bias:

The researcher neither assisted nor gave cues as to how the researcher would like questions answered.

The researcher adhered to the ethical standards when interpreting data as well as during the interview session.

The researcher always consulted with the supervisor consistently for guidance.

The researcher also listened attentively to participants and recorded everything participants said and took field notes recording their non-verbal behaviour.

### **3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Bos (2020) explains that ethics consist of moral principles proposed by individuals or groups that are generally accepted. These principles provide guidelines and expectations for appropriate conduct towards experimental subjects, respondents, employers, sponsors, fellow researchers, assistants, and students.

Before the study began, clearance letters for data collection were secured from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and the University of Limpopo's Registrar (see attached appendices). Appointments were arranged with the selected participants before the interviews took place. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were held with the participants, and the researcher utilised the interview schedule to guide the investigation (see the attached interview schedule in the appendix). The interactions between the interviewer and interviewees were conducted in person, with the interviewer guiding the discussions. Each interview session was allotted sufficient time, typically around 30 minutes, although some interviews concluded in less time. The researcher ensured that interview environments were quiet, comfortable, and non-threatening to facilitate open communication. With participants' consent, sessions were audio recorded to ensure accurate data capture. English was the language used during the interviews, consistent with the institution's standard medium of instruction.

#### **3.12.1 Anonymity**

The researcher made sure that participants' names and other identifying information were not linked to the data. The participants' rights and desires for anonymity were fully respected.

### **3.12.2 Confidentiality**

In every study conducted, it is crucial to protect the confidentiality of participants' information. Safeguarding this information is a fundamental aspect of ethical research practices (Petrova, Dewing, and Camilleri 2016). Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that no participant information was shared with others. Additionally, a covering letter was provided to explain the purpose of the study.

### **3.12.3 Informed consent**

The informed consent form must indicate that participation is voluntary and that the individual is not obligated to take part in the study. It should also specify that they have the right to withdraw at any time (Millum and Bromwich 2021). Informed consent is a common procedure where participants willingly take part in a study, fully understanding any possible risks involved. Participants play a crucial role in data collection for any research study, making their informed consent a key part of the research process (Babbie and Mouton, 2010). In this study, participants were provided with all the details of the study and their consent was obtained.

### **3.12.4 No harm to participants**

Social research should never subject people to harm. It is the responsibility of the researcher to look for subtle dangers and guard against them (May and Perry, 2022). The researcher considered this aspect throughout the study. Participants were given the supervisor's name and contact details, enabling them to reach out if they experienced any anxiety or discomfort following the interviews. If needed, they could be referred to a suitable professional.

## **3.13 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter outlined research design and explained how research was operationalised. The methodology used in this study was qualitative and exploratory. It utilised semi-structured interviews to gather data from individual participants, including administrative staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa.

TCA was used to analyse the collected data, aiming to interpret subjective content and identify themes or patterns within the participants' experiences. TCA followed

systematic and transparent procedures to ensure the validity and reliability of the inferences drawn from the data analysis. Overall, the methodology aimed to provide a personalised and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to career mobility among female administrative staff in the specified context.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter delineated the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data collected from female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo. It adopted a qualitative research methodology. The study focused exclusively on the qualitative data derived from interview responses. The insights gained from these interviews were analysed within the thematic framework aimed at exploring the factors that influence career mobility for female administrative staff within the institution. By examining these responses, this chapter aimed to reveal the underlying issues that impact the professional development and advancement of women in administrative roles.

In addition, the chapter systematically organised the data to provide clarity on the participants' experiences and perceptions. Each section reflected on specific themes that emerged from the interviews, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics affecting female staff. This structured approach not only aided in the analysis, but also enhanced the interpretative process, ensuring that the voices of the participants were adequately represented. The intention was to provide a nuanced exploration of the barriers and facilitators that shape the career trajectories of women in this context. Furthermore, the insights gathered through this study contributed to the broader discourse on gender equity in higher education. By focusing on the specific experiences of female administrative staff, the study illuminated the complexities of their career journeys and highlighted the institutional factors that either hinder or support their professional growth. This chapter served as a critical examination of the current landscape, ultimately offering recommendations for enhancing gender equity in administrative roles.

Overall, the chapter laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women administrative staff at the University of Limpopo and the systemic changes needed to foster an environment conducive to their career advancement.

## **4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

The demographic profile of the participants provides a crucial context for interpreting the qualitative data. A total of eleven (11) female participants were involved in the study, with a significant majority (nine) holding a permanent employment status, while the remaining two were on contractual agreements. The age distribution was particularly telling; six participants were aged 35 and above, two fell within the 26 to 30 age group, and two were between 31 and 35. Only one participant was within the 20 to 25 age range. This demographic snapshot indicated a diverse group of professionals, predominantly representing experienced individuals.

In terms of job titles, most participants were administrative officers (six), followed by two principal administration officers, two administration assistants, and one assistant registrar. This distribution reflects a range of roles within the administrative structure, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the various experiences of female staff. The representation of different job titles is essential for understanding how position and

responsibilities may influence perceptions of career mobility and empowerment. Additionally, the demographic data revealed that most participants possessed considerable experience within the institution, likely contributing to their insights on career advancement and the challenges faced. The diversity in age and professional roles suggested that the experiences shared in the interviews may reflect a spectrum of perspectives, enriching the overall findings of the study. This demographic variety enabled a multifaceted analysis of the factors affecting women's career mobility in administrative roles at the University of Limpopo. Consequently, the demographic profile serves as a foundational element for interpreting the qualitative data, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the participants' insights and experiences within the institutional context.

### **4.3. EMERGING THEMES FROM THE STUDY**

The following are emerging themes from the study.

#### **4.3.1 THEME1: OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

This theme focuses on the available opportunist and structures for women empowerment at the University of Limpopo.

##### **4.3.1.1 Sub theme 1: Structures supporting women empowerment**

Some participants highlighted the existence of initiatives such as NEHAWU and UASA, which provide benefits to their female members, encouraging participation in programmes aimed at empowerment. Participant 1 said: "The only thing that I know is that there is NEHAWU, and they are promoting gender balance during interviews." Some women identify leave the system as structures that support their advancement in their career, because staying allows one to accumulate experience after maternity leave. Participant 2 added: "There are leave systems that support women who go maternity".

##### **4.3.1.2 Sub theme 2: Implementation of Employment Equity Act.**

The discussion of the Employment Equity Act revealed that many participants recognised its implementation during the hiring process, noting that they were encouraged to apply for advertised positions. However, a prevalent theme emerged

regarding the lack of information available about the initiatives and policies designed to promote gender equity. This suggests a critical need for institutions to better communicate their policies and initiatives to foster an environment that uplifts women in the workplace.

#### **4.3.1.3 Sub theme 3: Access to resources**

One participant emphasised the fairness of the workplace culture, citing the provision of necessary resources, such as internet access and laptops, which facilitate effective work performance. This suggests that while certain initiatives are in place to empower women at university, significant gaps remain. Participant 6 said: “We as women have all the resources in place to work effectively, University of Limpopo is workable place as there is access to internet, even if we work from home, we always have enough data’s and laptops to work, and we can transfer call to our cell phones to answer phone call but the challenge is when it comes to physical information such as files is not accessible”.

#### **4.3.1.4 Sub theme 4: Positive work environment**

The general work environment was characterised as positive because most women saw it as workable place. Participant 5 said: “I would say it is pleasant, there is collegiality, there is teamwork spirit among administrative staff”, and Participant 8 said “The overall work environment I can say is fine because we have all the resources that are needed to do our work as admin staff”.

### **4.3.2 THEME 2: OBSTACLES HINDERING CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS**

The obstacles listed below were recognised as barriers to the career advancement of women in administrative roles.

#### **4.3.2.1 Sub theme 1: Work-life balance challenge**

Participants expressed a range of views regarding the work-life balance in their roles, with many indicating a lack of support in this area. Some voiced feelings of being undervalued, contributing to a perception of limited empowerment. Participant 10 said the “University of Limpopo does not support work-life balance for women in administrative positions.” Conversely, a few participants noted that they experienced

a lesser degree of work-life balance due to not working on weekends and having access to maternity leave. Participant 4 said: “Women only get four months maternity leave. Even after maternity leave, there is no offer for a flexible work arrangement”.

#### **4.3.2.2 Sub theme 2: The challenge of gender equity**

One participant commented on the ongoing challenges of gender equity, stating, “I think the university is trying their best to balance gender equity since nowadays when they advertise posts, most preference is for males for administrative positions.” This statement reflects the persistent barriers that women face in achieving equal representation in administrative roles, underscoring the need for institutions to continually assess and improve their practices in promoting gender equity.

#### **4.3.2.3 Sub theme 3: Limited promotion opportunities**

Participants provided insights regarding the promotion processes, feedback mechanisms, gender equality initiatives, perceived barriers, mentorship opportunities, and recognition within their administrative roles. A common sentiment among participants was that promotions are contingent upon the availability of vacancies, as articulated by Participant 5: “promotion and advancement only take place if there is a vacant position available.” This observation highlights the systemic limitations faced by employees striving for advancement, where even diligent performance may not guarantee promotion without corresponding opportunities. The statement was supported by the Participant 7 who said: “There is no growth in administrative positions. For one to move from one position to another, you have to wait for one colleague to move.”

#### **4.3.2.4 Sub theme 4: Limited mentoring programmes and work recognition**

The absence of recognition and mentorship for female administrative staff was also an important aspect to consider. The participants expressed the need for a greater acknowledgment of their contributions and for structured mentorship programmes that could facilitate professional growth. Participant 6 said: “Since there is no mentorship that I know in place for women in administration, it means there is no growth.” This sentiment highlights the perceived absence of mentorship as a significant impediment to professional development. Most women advocated more structured mentorship

programmes and recognition of the contributions made by women in the workplace. Some participants suggested that enhancing mentorship and support systems would involve providing training for managers and administrative staff, thus creating a more supportive atmosphere for career advancement.

The findings resonate with the research conducted by Mcilongo and Strydom (2021), which identified the importance of acquiring additional skills and knowledge as prerequisites for career advancement. Their research classified the factors affecting women's career advancement into self-motivated and employer-driven components, highlighting the importance of mentorship in promoting professional development. Similarly, Kabeer (2021) advocates the implementation of mentorship initiatives to bolster women's career trajectories. Additionally, participants identified the lack of professional development opportunities as a significant barrier to advancement. The absence of tailored feedback mechanisms further exacerbated this challenge, as participants noted the importance of constructive feedback for empowering female employees. Collectively, these insights underscore the critical need for institutions to implement robust mentorship and professional development initiatives aimed at fostering career mobility for women in administrative positions.

#### **4.4 DISCUSSION ON EMPIRICAL DATA**

Ultimately, the findings in this section highlight the importance of implementing comprehensive strategies that enhance women's empowerment in higher education. Institutions must not only evaluate their existing policies, but also actively engage female staff in discussions about their experiences and needs to create a more equitable work environment. Furthermore, many participants pointed out the gender disparity in leadership roles within the administrative hierarchy. They noted that while women are well-represented at lower levels of administration, higher-level positions remain predominantly occupied by men. This disparity raises concerns about the lack of female representation in leadership, reinforcing the need for initiatives that promote women's advancement in these roles. Participants expressed the belief that enhancing mentorship and support systems would help address the barriers women face and motivate them to pursue further training and development opportunities.

Conversely, some participants contended that female administrators are afforded equal opportunities for leadership roles, citing that employment and promotional opportunities are open to all qualified individuals. This perspective suggests a divide in experiences, indicating that while some women perceive barriers to advancement, others believe that equality exists within the application processes. This divergence highlights the complexity of the situation and the necessity for an ongoing dialogue about the realities faced by female administrative staff.

Overall, the participants' insights underscore the critical importance of establishing mentorship programmes and recognition initiatives to support women in administrative roles. By addressing these challenges, institutions can foster an environment that not only acknowledges the contributions of female staff, but also promotes their professional growth and leadership aspirations.

Several factors influencing the advancement of women in administrative roles were identified throughout the interviews. Numerous participants indicated that the enforcement of the Employment Equity Act acts as an essential policy framework designed to enhance gender equality in administrative roles. However, there was a consensus that ongoing evaluation of this act is necessary to ensure its continued effectiveness in addressing the specific challenges faced by women. Additionally, the participants highlighted the absence of mechanisms for collecting feedback from female administrative staff regarding their professional development. This gap signifies that institutions may struggle to adequately respond to the unique needs of women in these roles. The participants also emphasised the lack of recognition for the contributions of female administrators, arguing that acknowledgment is vital for boosting employees' morale. This indicates an urgent need for institutions to reassess their policies to enhance recognition and ensure transparency in promotion processes.

Most participants agreed that promotions do not occur automatically, as individuals often need to navigate competitive processes, including interviews for available positions. This competitive nature of advancement can be discouraging, particularly in an environment where systemic barriers exist. Furthermore, participants noted the absence of specific initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality within administrative roles, signalling a need for targeted strategies to facilitate a more supportive work environment.

In summary, the elements influencing the progression of women in administrative roles emphasise the crucial areas that higher education institutions need to address. By implementing comprehensive policies and practices aimed at promoting gender equity, institutions can create an environment that supports and empowers female administrative staff, ultimately enhancing their career mobility and professional growth.

This section addresses the difficulties encountered by women in administrative positions at higher education institutions, including perceived obstacles, awareness of gender bias, mentorship and support systems, promotion procedures, feedback mechanisms, and practices for recognition. Numerous participants noted that the absence of mentorship and support is a major hindrance to career progression. They articulated a need for training programmes designed for both managers and administrative staff, which could help mitigate the obstacles encountered by female employees.

Some participants suggested that there were no widespread challenges impacting women in administrative roles, pointing to opportunities for furthering their studies as a positive aspect. However, this view contrasted sharply with the perspectives of others, who emphasised the detrimental effects of inadequate mentorship on career progression. Moreover, a recurring theme was the predominance of male leaders in higher positions, which underscores the urgent need to address these gender disparities within the institution.

The importance of promoting mentorship as an accessible resource was highlighted by numerous participants, who believed that improved mentorship opportunities would enhance their professional success. Work-life balance surfaced as a significant challenge, especially for women in their childbearing years, who frequently encounter increased pressures from both their professional duties and personal obligations. Participants expressed the need for greater institutional support to navigate these dual pressures effectively.

In summary, the challenges identified in this section reflect the multifaceted barriers that women encounter in administrative roles. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from institutions to implement effective mentorship programmes,

enhance support systems, and foster a more equitable work environment for female staff.

## 4.5 FINDINGS

This section discusses the results of the research study.

### 4.5.1 Demographic Insights

The demographic profile of the participants highlights a notable trend regarding the employment status and age distribution of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo. With nine out of eleven participants were permanently employed, it nevertheless indicated a relatively stable workforce, albeit with a small percentage on contracts. A majority of participants being aged 35 and above suggested a more experienced cohort, yet the underrepresentation of younger staff (only one participant aged 20-25) raised questions about succession planning and the integration of younger professionals into the administrative framework. This demographic data underscores the importance of fostering a diverse age representation to ensure fresh perspectives and innovation within the institution.

#### Demographic Table

No.	Gender	Age Group	Occupation	Employment Basis
1	Female	20-25	Administrative Officer	Contract
2	Female	26-30	Administration Officer	Contract
3	Female	35 and older	Assistant Registrar	Permanent
4	Female	31-35	Principal Administration Officer	Permanent
5	Female	35 and older	Principal Admin Officer	Permanent
6	Female	35 and older	Administrator Officer	Permanent
7	Female	35 and older	Admin Officer	Permanent
8	Female	35 and older	Administration Officer	Permanent
9	-	20-25, 26-30, 31-35, 35 and older	Administration Assistant, Administration Officer, Principal Administration Officer, Assistant Registrar	Permanent or Contract
10	Female	31-35	Administration Assistant	Permanent
11	Female	35 and older	Administration Officer	Permanent

#### **4.5.2 Work-Life Balance Challenges**

The study revealed significant concerns about work-life balance among female administrative staff. While some participants acknowledged a lack of weekend work and maternity leave provisions, many reported feeling undervalued and stressed due to the demands of their roles. The mixed responses regarding work-life balance suggested that while policies exist, their implementation may not be uniformly perceived or experienced. This inconsistency could affect job satisfaction and overall well-being, indicating a need for the university to reassess its work-life balance initiatives and ensure they are adequately supporting female staff, particularly those with familial responsibilities.

#### **4.5.3 Perceived Barriers to Career Advancement**

Participants identified several barriers to career mobility, including limited professional development opportunities and insufficient mentorship. The consensus was that while hard work is essential for promotion, the lack of available positions often stymies advancement. Many expressed frustrations over the absence of mentorship programmes that could provide guidance and support for career progression. This lack of structured mentorship could be a critical factor contributing to the stagnation of women in administrative roles, highlighting the need for systematic initiatives aimed at fostering professional growth through mentorship and training.

#### **4.5.4 Gender Equity Initiatives**

While the Employment Equity Act was acknowledged as a positive step toward promoting gender equity, participants noted a lack of awareness regarding specific initiatives aimed at supporting women's advancement. Many felt that although the university claimed to encourage applications from women, the actual recruitment and promotion practices still favoured male candidates, particularly in leadership roles. This disparity suggests that while policies may exist, their effectiveness is hindered by a lack of transparency and communication, necessitating a reevaluation of how gender equity initiatives are implemented and communicated to staff.

#### **4.5.5 Recognition and Visibility Issues**

The findings indicate a troubling lack of recognition and visibility for female administrative staff within the University. The participants expressed the view that their contributions often go unacknowledged, which can diminish morale and motivation. The absence of formal recognition programmes highlights a significant gap in the institutional culture, suggesting that efforts to celebrate the achievements of female staff could bolster their visibility and encourage a more inclusive environment. Institutions should consider developing recognition frameworks that specifically highlight the successes and contributions of women in administrative roles.

#### **4.5.6 Perceptions of Mentorship and Support**

The lack of mentorship was frequently cited as a barrier to growth and advancement, with participants indicating a strong desire for structured support systems. Many believed that mentorship could play a vital role in their professional development and career mobility. The insights suggest that introducing formal mentorship programmes and training for both mentors and mentees could facilitate the exchange of knowledge and foster a supportive community. This could ultimately enhance career trajectories and empower women to pursue leadership opportunities more confidently.

The results of this study highlight the essential factors influencing the career advancement of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo. By addressing the identified barriers and enhancing support structures, the University can create a more inclusive environment that promotes gender equity and empowers women to advance in their careers.

#### **4.6 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter presented, analysed, and interpreted the data collected from female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo regarding the factors affecting their career mobility. The chapter began by outlining the demographic profile of the participants, providing a context for their experiences and perspectives. The data were analysed thematically, highlighting key factors influencing career mobility. Through a detailed interpretation, the chapter identified recurring patterns and unique perspectives, linking the findings to the study's research objectives. Thus, this chapter

laid the groundwork for the subsequent discussion by providing a comprehensive understanding of the data, emphasising the contextual and subjective nature of career mobility challenges and opportunities at the University of Limpopo.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5. INTRODUCTION**

This section presents the recommendations for stakeholders at the higher institutional level of universities.

#### **5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

The findings of this study highlight several key factors influencing the career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo. Demographic insights revealed a stable yet aging workforce, with limited representation of younger professionals, thus raising concerns about succession planning and the integration of fresh talent. Participants identified significant work-life balance challenges, including stress and undervaluation despite existing policies. Perceived barriers to career advancement, such as limited mentorship, insufficient professional development opportunities, and a lack of available positions, were recurrent themes. Gender equity initiatives, while acknowledged, were seen as poorly communicated and ineffective, with male candidates often favoured in leadership roles.

Recognition and visibility emerged as critical issues, with participants reporting that their contributions often go unnoticed, which ultimately affects their morale negatively. The lack of formal mentorship and structured support systems was also identified as a significant barrier, with participants expressing a strong desire for programmes that could guide their professional growth. Addressing these barriers by enhancing mentorship opportunities, fostering recognition programmes, and improving the implementation of gender equity initiatives could empower female administrative staff to advance in their careers and create a more inclusive institutional culture.

#### **5.2 UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION**

To enhance career mobility for female administrative staff, the university administration should prioritise implementing mentorship programmes tailored specifically for women. By providing structured mentorship, female employees can receive guidance from experienced leaders, helping them navigate their career paths more effectively. Additionally, the administration should regularly evaluate and update their policies regarding promotion and advancement to ensure they are equitable and

transparent. Creating clear pathways for advancement, including defined criteria for promotions and professional development opportunities, will empower female staff and foster a culture of inclusivity.

### **5.3 HUMAN RESOURCES**

The Human Resources (HR) Department should undertake a comprehensive awareness campaign about existing initiatives and policies related to gender equity. Many participants expressed a lack of information regarding available resources, so HR can play a critical role in disseminating this information. They should also establish feedback mechanisms that allow female staff to voice their concerns and suggestions regarding career advancement and workplace culture. By actively seeking and responding to feedback, HR can identify barriers to mobility and implement targeted interventions.

### **5.4 FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT HEADS**

Department heads and faculty deans must acknowledge the significance of work-life balance, especially for female administrative staff. Implementing flexible work arrangements and ensuring that staff feel supported during significant life events, such as maternity leave, can contribute to a more positive work environment. Moreover, promoting an inclusive culture within departments is crucial; leaders should actively encourage female staff to pursue leadership roles and advocate their visibility in decision-making processes. Providing training on gender bias and inclusive leadership can equip department heads to foster a supportive environment.

### **5.5 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COORDINATORS**

Professional development coordinators should enhance training opportunities that are specifically designed for women in administrative roles. This can include workshops focusing on leadership skills, negotiation tactics, and career advancement strategies. Collaborations with external organisations dedicated to women's empowerment can provide additional resources and networking opportunities. Additionally, developing a recognition programme that celebrates the contributions and achievements of female staff can boost morale and inspire others to seek advancement.

## **5.6 EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS AND POLICY MAKERS**

External stakeholders, including policymakers and educational authorities, should monitor the implementation of the Employment Equity Act to ensure it effectively promotes gender equality in higher education institutions. Encouraging collaboration between universities and governmental bodies can facilitate the sharing of best practices and resources aimed at supporting women's career mobility. By addressing systemic barriers and promoting policies that advance women's representation in leadership positions, stakeholders can create a more equitable environment for female administrative staff across institutions.

By implementing these recommendations, the University of Limpopo and other higher institutions can create a more supportive and equitable environment for their female administrative staff. This not only aligns with broader gender equity goals, but also enhances the overall effectiveness and morale of the institution. It is imperative that all stakeholders collaborate to ensure sustained progress toward empowering women in higher education.

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the data presented highlight significant insights into the factors influencing the career mobility of female administrative staff at the University of Limpopo. Through a qualitative analysis of interviews with eleven participants, it became evident that while some measures have been taken to empower women, substantial barriers persist that hinder their advancement. The demographic profile indicated a predominantly experienced workforce, yet the underrepresentation of younger women suggests potential issues with succession planning and the integration of new talent. Furthermore, the concerns regarding work-life balance reflect a pressing need for the university to reassess its support structures to better accommodate the unique challenges faced by female employees.

The findings reveal a complex landscape of perceived barriers, particularly in relation to mentorship, professional development, and recognition. While participants acknowledged some initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity, there was a clear sentiment that these efforts were insufficient and often poorly communicated. The lack of structured mentorship programmes emerged as a critical gap, preventing women

from accessing the guidance and support necessary for career progression. Additionally, the absence of effective feedback mechanisms further complicates the ability to tailor development opportunities for female staff, underscoring a systemic issue within the institution's approach to fostering an equitable work environment.

Overall, the study emphasises the urgent need for the University of Limpopo to implement comprehensive policies that not only promote gender equity, but also actively support the professional growth of female administrative staff. By establishing robust mentorship programmes, enhancing recognition initiatives, and improving work-life balance provisions, the university has the potential to foster a more inclusive culture that enables women to progress in their careers. This transformative approach is essential not only for the individual growth of female staff, but also for the overall success and sustainability of the institution, as diverse leadership is critical for fostering innovation and excellence in higher education.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO



**University of Limpopo**  
Department of Research Administration and Development  
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: tukiso.sewapa@ul.ac.za

**TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**  
**ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

**DATE:** 09 April 2024

**PROJECT NUMBER:** TREC/96/2024: PG

**PROJECT:**

**Title:** Exploring Factors Affecting Career Mobility of Female Administrative Staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa  
**Researcher:** DK Matlala  
**Supervisor:** Prof M Kanjere  
**Co-Supervisor/s:** N/A  
**School:** Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership  
**Degree:** Master of Business Administration

**PROF D MAPOSA**  
**CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

**Note:**

- i) This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.
- ii) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.
- iii) PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

## APPENDIX B: A LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO



University of Limpopo  
Office of the Registrar

Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 2407, Fax: (015) 268 3048, Email: [Kwena.Masha@ul.ac.za](mailto:Kwena.Masha@ul.ac.za)/[Retha.Balie@ul.ac.za](mailto:Retha.Balie@ul.ac.za)

24 April 2024

DK Matlala

Email: [kgahlela.matlala@ul.ac.za](mailto:kgahlela.matlala@ul.ac.za)

Dear DK Matlala,

### GATEKEEPER PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

**TITLE: EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING CAREER MOBILITY OF FEMALE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA**

**Researcher:** DK Matlala  
**Supervisor:** Prof. M Kanjere  
**Co-Supervisor/s:** N/A  
**School:** Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership  
**Degree:** Master of Business Administration

Kindly be informed that Gatekeeper permission is granted to you to conduct research at the University of Limpopo entitled: **"Exploring Factors affecting Career Mobility of Female Administrative Staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa"**.

Regards,

**PROF. JK MASHA**  
**UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR**

Cc. Prof. R.J Singh: Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Research, Innovation and Partnerships  
Prof. RN Madadzhe: Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Teaching and Learning  
Dr. T Mabila, Director: Research Development and Administration  
Prof. D Maposa – Chairperson: Research and Ethics Committee  
Dr. T Sewapa, Ethics Officer  
Ms. M Hutamo – Assistant: Ethics Secretarist

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

### ▲ APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

My name is Matlala Daniel at the University of Limpopo. I am carrying out this research towards completion of my dissertation, titled, **Exploring Factors Affecting Career Mobility of Female Administrative Staff at the University of Limpopo, South Africa**. I am requesting you to participate in this study.

For your participation in the study, please note the following:

- There are no wrong answers, all answers are correct.
- Your participation is voluntary; you are allowed to withdraw from the study without penalties at any time if you do not wish to continue.
- The information that you will provide will be treated as confidential and your name will not be recorded anywhere.

Thanking you in anticipation for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Matlala D

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## **APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

RESEARCH TITLE: EXPLORING [THE] FACTORS AFFECTING [THE] CAREER MOBILITY OF FEMALE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA. [INTERVIEW QUESTIONS]

OBJECTIVE 1: TO INVESTIGATE THE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH OF WOMEN IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO.

### 1. Biographical Information

- Age Group [20-25, 26-30, 31-35, and 35 and older]
- Occupation [Administration Assistant, Administration Officer, Principal Administration Officer, Assistant Registrar, and Directors]
- Employment basis: [Permanent or on contract basis]

### 2. General Understanding:

2.1 Can you provide an overview of the current administrative structure at the University of Limpopo?

2.2. How would you describe the overall work environment for administrative staff?

### 3. Professional Development Opportunities:

3.1. What formal professional development programmes or opportunities are available for administrative staff?

3.2 Specifically for women in administrative positions, are there any targeted programmes or initiatives to support their professional growth?

### 4. Mentorship and Guidance:

4.1 Are there mentorship programmes in place for women in administrative roles?

4.2. How is mentorship encouraged within the administrative departments, especially for women seeking career growth?

## 5. Promotion and Advancement:

5.1 Can you describe the promotion and advancement process for administrative positions?

5.2. Are there specific efforts to ensure gender equality in promotions within the administrative ranks?

## 6. Training and Skill Enhancement:

6.1 What training opportunities are available to help administrative staff, particularly women, enhance their skills?

6.2 Are there specific skill development programs tailored to the needs of women in administrative roles?

## 7. Work-Life Balance and Flexibility:

7.1 How does the university support work-life balance for women in administrative positions?

7.2 Are there flexible work arrangements available to accommodate various needs?

## 8. Feedback Mechanisms:

8.1 What mechanisms are in place for collecting feedback from women in administrative roles regarding their professional growth?

8.2 How is feedback used to improve and tailor opportunities for career development?

## 9. Gender Equality Initiatives:

9.1 Can you discuss any specific initiatives or policies in place to promote gender equality in administrative positions?

9.2 How does the university address any gender-specific challenges that women might face in their professional growth?

## 10. Networking Opportunities:

10.1 Are there networking events or forums specifically designed for women in administrative roles?

10.2 How does the university facilitate networking and collaboration among women in different administrative departments?

OBJECTIVE 2: TO DETERMINE THE OBSTACLES HINDERING THE CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO.

11. Perceived Barriers:

11.1 From your perspective, what are some of the perceived barriers that female administrators face in advancing their careers at the University of Limpopo?

11.2 Are there any common challenges that women in administrative positions have reported regarding career advancement?

12. Workplace Culture:

12.1 How would you describe the overall workplace culture with respect to gender equality in administrative positions?

12.2 Have instances or feedback been suggesting a gender-specific culture affecting career advancement?

13. Leadership Opportunities:

13.1 In your opinion, are female administrators provided with equal opportunities for leadership roles and responsibilities?

13.2 Are there any specific challenges related to female representation in leadership positions within the administrative structure?

14. Recognition and Visibility:

14.1 How are the work and contributions of female administrators recognised and acknowledged within the university?

14.2 Are there any visibility challenges that may impact career advancement for women in administrative roles?

15. Promotional Processes:

15.1 Are there any concerns or challenges related to the transparency of the promotion process for female administrators?

15.2 Have there been instances where women felt overlooked or faced obstacles in the promotion process?

16. Training and Skill Development:

16.1 Do female administrators face any challenges in accessing training or skill development opportunities compared to their male counterparts?

16.2 Are there specific skill gaps that hinder the career advancement of women in administrative positions?

17. Work-Life Balance Issues:

17.1 How does the university address work-life balance concerns for female administrators, and do these concerns impact career advancement?

17.2 Are there any perceptions that work-life balance is a more significant challenge for women in administrative roles?

18. Mentorship and Support:

18.1 Are there sufficient mentorship opportunities for female administrators, and do they perceive any lack of support in their career advancement?

18.2 How can mentorship and support systems be improved to address potential obstacles?

19. Gender Bias Awareness:

19.1 To what extent is the university actively addressing gender bias, and how does it impact the career progression of female administrators?

19.2 Are there any steps taken to raise awareness and eliminate gender biases within the administrative structure?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!!!!!!!!!!!

## APPENDIX E: EDITOR'S REPORT



**WriteRight Language Editing Services**  
640 Munnik Avenue, Bendor, Polokwane, 0699  
Registration No. 2023/162786/07  
[moffatsebola@gmail.com](mailto:moffatsebola@gmail.com), 0697110718  
DATE: 30 January 2025  
Re: Certificate of Editing

I hereby advise that I edited a **mini-dissertation** titled: **"EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING CAREER MOBILITY OF FEMALE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO SOUTH AFRICA"** by **DANIEL KGAHLELA MATLALA**. My editorial interventions entailed, among other aspects, the following:

English academic language editing, including grammar, spelling, tenses and subject/verb agreement. Efforts were made to ensure that UK English instead of US English was used consistently in the text. Therefore, verbs such as "organize", "emphasize", "realize" and "behavior" were spelled thus, "organise", "emphasise", "realise" and "behaviour", respectively.

Style and full reference editing according to the Institution's style guide. Here, I checked the author's consistency in the formatting of in-text references, footnotes and the list of references, including checking that all the sources cited in text were duly acknowledged and that all the sources on the list of references appeared in the text.

Please note that I have not had sight of the manuscript since editing, with Daniel either accepting or rejecting suggested changes or corrections, as is usual. Unless tampered with prior to your reception of the edited work, I trust you will find the editing quality in order.

Regards

**Prof Moffat Sebola,**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Moffat Sebola", is placed on a light-colored rectangular background.