



Excluded in inclusion: Female employees' perspectives on career progression in the local government system of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study examined female employees' perspectives on career advancement within Ghana's local government system, focusing specifically on the Nabdram District in the Upper East Region. It is based on the Resilience and Career Motivation theories to explore female employees' views on their career development in the Assembly. Qualitative case study methods, guided by interpretivism, were employed to collect interview data from 15 female employees. These participants were selected through purposive and census sampling techniques. The data were analysed thematically. The findings are organised into three main themes: Female Motivations for Pursuing a Career, Female Staff Perspectives on Career Progression, and Milestones in Female Career Progression. Results indicate that the women's career advancement efforts were driven by personal ambitions and perseverance but hindered by weak institutional structures. Achieving higher academic qualifications and engaging in professional development were identified as key factors facilitating progression. The study concludes that institutional reforms and cultural shifts are crucial for fostering an equitable and supportive environment for female career development in the Nabdram District. Based on the conclusions, it is recommended that governmental agencies, such as the Nabdram District Assembly, undertake policy reforms that recognise the demands on female employees due to cultural factors and target enhancing female employees' progression at work.

Keywords: Career Progression, Female Employees, Gender Equity, Motivation, Resilience

I. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls worldwide. Similarly, Target 5 of the same goal seeks to ensure women's full and effective participation, as well as equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public spheres. This study draws on the Resilience and Career Motivation theories to explore female employees' views on career advancement within a public agency of the Nabdram District Assembly in the Upper East Region of Ghana. It was conducted with the aim of providing empirical support for recognising women's career development and, in particular, addressing gender issues that have recently become central in development discourse. Clearly, female employees' employment issues are a vital part of good governance and have attracted attention from the World Bank and other civil society organisations. However, the extent to which women's career progression is addressed, especially in public institutions, remains inadequate. Using the Nabdram District Assembly as a case, this work aims to guide public agencies in Ghana to protect, promote, and support women's employment issues.

In today's workplace, organisations are increasingly emphasising the improvement of their female employees' effectiveness and efficiency (Bonesso & Cortellazzo, 2024; Ramdhony et al., 2013), with some investing in training, conferences, and workshops. When pursued with commitment, productivity among female staff tends to increase. It is, therefore, not surprising that institutions such as the United Nations (UN), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), along with the World Bank, have over the years intensified their efforts and dedication towards activities promoting equal representation for women alongside men, and women's empowerment (Muthuma & Ndunge, 2025). In Ghana, the local government system established under Article 240 of the 1992 Constitution, comprising the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs), serves as the most authoritative government body at the community level (Addo-Yobo, 2013), maintaining closer ties with local residents on a daily basis (Amponsaa-Asenso, 2018). The Local Government Act 1993, Act 462, Section 10, Sub-Sections 1-3, grants the Assemblies full responsibility for all development matters across Ghana. One notable development issue involves addressing the barriers that hinder women's successful progress in the 21st-century workplace. Other key initiatives aimed at advocating for women's

inclusion in government and the broader Ghanaian economy include the establishment of bodies such as the National Council on Women and Development at the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (Gyansah & Guantai, 2018) and the enactment of the Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024 (Act 1121).

Scholars have offered reasons that influence women's employment progression. The National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) (2017) have identified family responsibilities as a key issue that hinders female employees' chances of staying relevant at work and progressing in the civil service. Some other identified hindrances that women face in their line of work are preference of a particular gender for higher positions (Ali & Mahmood, 2018), negative cultural expressions directed at the feminine gender (Khan et al., 2024; Gyansah & Guantai, 2018), women's household responsibilities, and affiliations with professional entities (Obimpeh, 2018; Heller, 2017), and female-unfriendly environments (Adetula et al., 2014). Additionally, Coughlan and Patton (2018) pointed out four other salient factors that they describe as "epileptic" that affect female employees' stay and progress at work. These include unfavourable working atmosphere, gender preference for certain positions (glass ceiling), the non-existence of flexible organisational structures and the lack of challenging tasks.

Gammie and Gammie (2019) have indicated clearly that women's career potentials at the local government level are nothing to write home about; one that is grossed with heavy inequalities. This work focuses on the Nabdam District Assembly of the Local Government system of Ghana to explore female employees' perspectives on their career progression.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In modern times, global workplace policies provide for fair and equitable treatment and career progression for all employees. Subsequently, various national frameworks provide for labour protection. In Ghana, the Republican Constitution, 1992, and the Labour Act, 2000, provide significant legal framework for the protection of all employees irrespective of gender. Literature exists on career development (Gyansah & Guantai, 2018), however, studies on the career progression of women are few (Amponsaa-Asenso, 2018), and outside the context of Ghana. For instance, a study by Ahmad et al. (2024) investigated the career development of women in Pakistan, discovering that cultural beliefs and limited access to education and training opportunities were significant barriers to career growth. Another study by Ali and Mahmood (2018) examined the experiences of women working in the public sector in Pakistan, highlighting various challenges related to gender bias, insufficient support from male colleagues, and restricted access to networking and career development opportunities. A few studies in developing countries have focused on specific professions such as the accounting profession (Amponsaa-Asenso, 2018), to the neglect of female employees' career progression within governmental agencies.

Nonetheless, fair and equitable development of the human resource of every organisation is critical. The local government system established under Article 240 of the 1992 Constitution provides a governmental structure that functions to serve the daily needs of the citizens in the country. As the governmental agency with the mandate and full responsibility for all development matters across Ghana (Local Government Act, 2016), addressing the barriers that hinder women's successful progress in the 21st-century workplace is an uncompromising expectation. One major issue that has been identified in the career progression of women is the "glass ceiling" phenomenon. The glass ceiling refers to an invisible barrier that prevents women (and other marginalized groups) from advancing to higher-level positions within their organizations. This can be due to a variety of factors, including gender bias, discrimination, and a lack of opportunities or support for career development. What remains unclear is how career progression is with female employees, hence, this study examined the female employees' perspectives on the phenomenon of female employees career progression in the Nabdam District of the Ghana Local Government system.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Explore female employees' motivations for career pursuit in the Nabdam District Assembly of the Local Government system of Ghana.
- ii. Explore perspectives of female staff in the Nabdam District Assembly of the Local Government system of Ghana.
- iii. Determine milestones of career progression in the Nabdam District Assembly of the Local Government system of Ghana.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Insights were drawn from two theories, namely the Resilience and Career Motivation theories, to guide this work.

2.1.1 The Resilience Theory

The theory of resilience, originating in the field of physical sciences, offers us a framework to aid the



understanding of how people respond to challenges to maintain progress. This theory was applied in the field of human behaviour for the first time through the work of Garmezy, who studied how children still succeeded notwithstanding the experiences of significant adversity (Zimmerman, 2013). Resilience was later described by Vella and Pai (2019) as a dynamic process driven by what they termed “ordinary magic”, the daily protective factors deployed by human beings, such as problem-solving abilities, emotional regulation, and positive relationships, to deal with issues they encounter.

In the context of behaviour in organisations and employment relationships, resilience can be analysed at three levels: individual, group, and institutional (He & Wu, 2021). The theory contends that in challenging and complex work environments, personal attributes of individuals in that work environment, such as endurance, adaptability, and self-efficacy, become tools with which they can navigate through the challenges. Similarly, at the group level, employees in an organization can, through collaboration and support from peers and peer networks, navigate through complex organizations challenges. At the institutional level, resilient organisations themselves are expected to possess inbuilt mechanisms such as policies of equity, open leadership and flexibility to enable employees to bloom in the face of challenges. All three levels relate to issues of women's career progression, hence, apply in this work. It is my position that within the local government system of Ghana, and in particular, the Nabdam District Assembly, the elements as identified at both the group and institutional levels are remarkably deficient. Although many female employees display qualities of individual resilience, such as persistence and competence, systemic obstacles of the institutions they work in continue to serve as sources of encumbrance to their career progression. For example, the Auditor-General's Report (2023) revealed that only 5% of eligible women received promotions in the local government sector in Ghana in three years. This provides some attestation to the view that individual resilience alone is insufficient for progress within institutions without institutional support (Zimmerman, 2013). In this regard, it is expected that the Assembly organises career development and capacity building workshops for the employees to provide them with the opportunity of access to mentorship, training, and networking, which are key resources for career progression in organizations.

According to Xiao and Cao (2017), organisational resilience concerns the capacity of the institution to withstand destruction and successfully adjust via proactive planning and inclusive leadership. This calls for institutional support systems such as gender-sensitive policies in the local government system, particularly the Nabdam District, to facilitate equitable promotion and work-life balance. In line with the Resilience theory, it is hereby, argued akin to Vella and Pai (2019) view that personal growth and progress of employees in the Nabdam District is inextricably connected to the institutional support and structures of the Assembly, and that, without mechanisms and support put in place by the Assembly, for the purpose of supporting career development, individual resilience of female employees may eventually falter.

The Resilience Theory is especially relevant to this study because it helps identify both personal and institutional challenges facing female employees' career development within the Nabdam District Assembly. It extends the discussion on resilience beyond innate personal traits of employees to view it as a process involving direct institutional participation that can be promoted through targeted interventions such as mentorship, policy reforms, and inclusive leadership (Farchi & Peled-Avram, 2025).

2.1.2 Career Motivation Theory

Career Motivation Theory, developed by London (1983) and refined by London and Noe (1997), emphasises the motivational dynamics that influence individuals' career-related behaviour. This theory groups career motivation into three, namely: career identity, career insight, and career resilience. It explains career identity as the extent to which one's career is integral to their self-concept; career insight as realistic self-appraisal and goal setting; and career resilience to denote persistence in the face of setbacks. These three elements are relevant in this study as they provide a framework for the understanding of the female employees' motivation for career progression even in the face of institutional and cultural barriers.

Through the Career Motivation theory, we are able to understand and explain how female employees remain committed to their careers through self-driven goals, even when institutional and systemic environments or conditions are awkward (Boonzaier, 2014). Career motivation is critical in sustaining commitment to achieving long-term goals at the workplace. For Campbell and Pritchard (2016), employees' aims for career attainments in the future in the nature of personal fulfilment, promotion, or recognition fuel workers' career motivation. According to Caldwell and O'Reilly (1990), career motivation is driven by desire to achieve future goals determined through the state of the workplace environment. In the Nabdam District Assembly, female staff are required to make career choices amidst limited promotion prospects and a lack of institutional encouragement. In such a setting, intrinsic motivation becomes a critical determinant of professional advancement.

By bringing the Resilience and Career Motivation theories together, we are able to understand how personal attributes of workers and institutional systems, policies and practices shape employees' adaptabilities, career goal framing, and professional behaviours in the Nabdam District of the local government system in Ghana.



2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Career Progression Options in Organisations

Employees generally feel more engaged, especially when they believe their management or employer is supporting the development of their career goals and personal growth (Kim & Beehr, 2017). According to Kim and Beehr (2017), employees consistently rank career progression opportunities as a key factor in accepting or retaining a job. As a result, companies make significant progress to map out career paths for existing and prospective employees. Career pathing, as described by Malhotra et al. (2016), is a process through which employers within an organisation provide opportunities for their employees to assess their personal characteristics, experience, skills, goals, and education, among other things. A career development path is a comprehensive framework that outlines activities employees can undertake to improve their skills and develop their careers, which may lead to transfers, promotions, or appointments in different roles. When effectively implemented, career paths significantly benefit organisations through improved employee performance, increased job satisfaction, high morale, greater responsiveness, and enhanced productivity. Verma (2020) examined the nature of career advancement among women employees in bank branches of Haridwar district in Uttarakhand state. The study, which adopted an exploratory research design and involved 182 women employees through a questionnaire, identified three main dimensions of career advancement: career orientation, future aspirations, and present satisfaction. Hughes (2012), in his study, assessed career advancement among highly qualified women in the mining industry in Canada. The survey study collected both quantitative and qualitative data. He identified two main career paths, namely, the specialist and the corporate.

Over the past two decades, much has been documented regarding the exclusion of women from certain professions. Women's minority status in the corporate world has been described as the 'glass ceiling' (Wirth, 2015). Wirth (2015) defined the glass ceiling as organisational prejudices or attitudinal barriers that prevent women from holding top executive positions within organisations. Several factors have been identified as responsible for this glass ceiling. Gammie and Gammie (2019) indicate that the most significant factor responsible for glass ceiling is gender bias. They noted that in accountancy firms, there appears to be greater discrimination against women compared to men. Men are more likely to hold high-profile positions within the profession, whereas women are often left with menial tasks.

Many governments have recognized the need for equal representation of men and women in all sectors of the economy (Sojo et al., 2016). Through this, some governments have adopted the quota system, where certain numbers of men and women are needed in certain organisations (Sojo et al., 2016; Tsikata, 2018). Though there has been advocacy for women to assume top positions, there is still an underrepresentation of women in most organisations (Sojo et al., 2016). In Ghana, there is a quota system for the appointment of the executives (ministers), and this requires that the majority of them must be members of parliament (Ghana Parliament Hansard, 2019). Unfortunately, there is no such quota system when it comes to the recruitment of women and their subsequent progression in the public service (Tsikata, 2018).

According to Tsikata (2018), the problems of underrepresentation of women at the district assembly require immediate policy intervention. However, the policy intervention should encompass career-related policies geared towards the advancement of the career of female staff. It is worth noting that the Local Government system has no defined career advancement policy to guide staff, much more to specially advocate for women (Tsikata, 2018). However, programmes such as annual durbars, Independence Day celebrations and end-of-year reviews, are used to create opportunities for mentoring and networking. Shwed and Kalev (2014), identified networking programmes and mentoring as some means through which the human capital of women can be enhanced. Mentoring is viewed as a developmentally oriented link existing between a mentor and mentee. In this regard, the mentor is the more experienced person who provides coaching and guidance to the mentee who is less experienced or knowledgeable (Wanberg et al., 2003; Ragins, 1989).

2.2.2 Factors Influencing Career Progression among Women

Probing the factors that influence the progress of women employees in the occupations they work is laudable. Saadin et al. (2016) investigated the barriers associated with career advancement among female public servants at Perak State Secretariat, Ipoh, Malaysia, employing the descriptive survey design of research. Using the cluster technique in sampling respondents, 63 female public servants were engaged in the study. A questionnaire was used to survey the respondents. Results of the study indicated that work-life balance and gender stereotypes accounted for 60% of the changes in women's career advancement. The results further showed that when there is a balance between work and life, female public servants advance more in their careers. A study conducted by Davis (2021) also found that a major factor contributing to women's retention and progression within organizations is the implementation of work-family programs and creating environments that are supportive of women. In another study by Rogier and Padgett (2004), it was found that flexible time schedules have been used for several years due to the belief that they help employees manage work-life balance better. For women, being able to work with flexible time schedules made it easier to balance work and life demands and, consequently, made it easier to progress into upper-level positions. Similarly, Schmidt and



Duenas (2002) found that when women are provided with a supportive work environment, they succeed in their career path. The study found that the primary responsibility for creating a supportive environment rests on organizations.

Hadfield and Sen (2009) examined the success and potential barriers towards the career path of women in academic libraries. Through the feminist perspective, the study adopted the qualitative inquiry approach. The study sampled 12 female library workers through the purposive sampling procedure. Interviews were conducted with females in senior positions in the academic libraries in the UK. The interview data were analysed thematically. The study identified promotion, succession planning, role models/mentors, and confidence/aspirations as positive determinants of career progression among female library workers. Some barriers that hindered the progress of female staff included caring responsibilities, working for long hours, mobility, and a lack of work flexibility. A supportive environment provides workers with friendly workplace policies, but commitment from top management is crucial in implementing such policies. Another factor that contributes to women's development includes mentors. In a study, women executives in the UK and the USA reported that they need the support of mentors to advance (Riley, 2024). Mentor relationships help women advance by providing them with self-confidence and reducing their levels of stress. This was also confirmed by Nelson (2025), who found that especially important is the role of female mentors who provide role models to their protégés, helping them cope with discrimination, stereotyping, family/work balance, and social isolation.

Raja (2016) explored the factors responsible for career progression among women in management positions in universities in Pakistan. The study, which was qualitative in nature, deployed interviews and focus group discussions with 48 women holding both top and bottom management positions in universities in Pakistan. Results of the study revealed gender stereotyping, mobility, and perception of patriarchal society as factors influencing career progression among women employees in universities in the country. The findings showed that Pakistan was perceived as a patriarchal society; therefore, females were not so much considered for leadership and management roles. This culture really hindered most female employees from assuming top management positions in universities in the country. Mihails (2018) examined the factors associated with successful career paths among women at the Jelgava Regional Department of the State Employment Agency and Zemgale Regional Department of the State Police, Latvia. The study adopted the descriptive survey design, where 39 women employees at the aforementioned institutions in Latvia. In gathering data from respondents, a questionnaire was employed. The study revealed that roles in life, family and related duties, employment, traditions and stereotypes affected the choice and progression of career among women. In a descriptive design and stratified sampling techniques, Komiti and Moorosi (2020) on his part investigated the factors influencing career progression among women in Lesotho. One hundred (100) women were selected from selected parastatals in Lesotho. Both numerical and qualitative information were collected. It was found that constraints arising from family responsibilities, inequality in pay and training, sexual harassment, lack of mentoring and coaching, job characteristics, and glass ceiling impeded career progression of women in the country.

Again, Pillay-Naidoo and Vermells (2023) assessed the challenges and barriers female workers in executive positions face in Peru. It was a descriptive study that used the purposive technique of sampling to engage 24 female employees, comprising 11 females and 13 males. Information was obtained through an interview. It emerged from the study that females faced four main challenges in advancing through their careers. These included education and experience, family responsibilities, organizational culture, informal structures and public resources. In a related study, Amponsaa-Asenso (2018) assessed the barriers associated with career progression among women in the profession of accountancy in Kumasi. The study, which was descriptive in nature, surveyed 48 female accountants through the purposive technique of sampling in research. Questionnaires were used for collecting female accountants' data. It emerged from the study that factors such as long hours of work, discrimination in promotion, childcare and family responsibilities, heavy workload or paperwork, and poor work environment hindered the progress of female accountants. The ability to manage the demands of work and family effectively is undoubtedly the greatest hurdle for women in their careers (Kim & Beehr, 2017; Still & Timms, 1998; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Notably, one major debatable view about women's career needs is the fact that women are burdened with numerous household duties compared to men (Van Oosten et al., 2017), which may likely curtail the successful acquisition of education and professional development opportunities (Obimpeh, 2018).

Continuous professional development through education is a major prerequisite for occupying top organizational positions (Tharenou, 2017; Wirth, 2015). This is usually so because such positions require top managers to exhibit a high level of quick independent decisions that are critical for the organisational efficiency as a whole. Meanwhile, it has been established that female employees are faced with issues of less educational and occupational opportunities as well as training programmes that facilitate and enhance their professional practices (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Morley, 2014; Joshi & Dhar, 2023). Burke (2017) found that access to education, training, and development are part of the challenge to support women's advancement in organizations. Specifically, access to formal management training programs, access to the appropriate and relevant training, tailoring training to the needs of women, and training in gender equity are believed to be factors that positively influence women's advancement in organizations. Agherdien et al. (2024) found that organizations that maintain cultures that promote gender equity are more likely to have an



increasing number of women in management positions. Agherdien et al. (2024) further indicated that since organizations are based on norms, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions, which in turn influence organizational practices, tacit norms, and values, a gender-friendly would promote career progression among women.

Scholars have also asserted that informal networks may also hinder the engagement of women in top executive and high-profile managerial positions (Tharenou, 2017; Hynd & Broadbridge, 2018; Ragins, 1989; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2015), as they are known for not involving themselves with more informal networks for the risk of sexual abuse and/or workplace romance. However, Morley (2014) interprets the creation of an environment of avoidance through informal networks as a barrier to promotion. Morley is of the view that women, in most instances, create several heterogeneous networks, and this hinders them from attaining high-profile positions, while males, on the other hand, establish a uniform network.

Acker and Haque (2017) encourage women with local government systems who want to progress through the ranks at municipal assemblies to actively engage in politics. To Acker and Haque (2017), local government is an important avenue for getting practical experience for participation in politics before moving to the national arena. Advocates of decentralisation argue that it opens up avenues for women to articulate their interests, to enter arenas of political decision-making, and to advance women's interests. However, studies by Agherdien et al. (2024) show that women's representation in local government does not guarantee that they will have any substantial influence over policy decisions, or that they will articulate women's interests, but, it depends on the incentives facing them as representatives. They add that it requires a conscious and deliberate action on the part of the women to make a difference.

Gender stereotypes and male values and patterns largely dominate organisational cultures (Hynd & Broadbridge, 2018; Joshi & Dhar, 2023; Ragins, 1989). Due to the effect of these stereotypes, many people still believe that the best managers are males (Powell & Butterfield, 2022). Ragins (1989) had attributed this to stereotypes regarding managerial skills. Again, O'Neil and Bilimoria (2015) argue that female talents and skills are unappreciated and frowned upon by many organisations due to stereotyping, with many organisations appreciating patterns of behaviour associated with male such as assertiveness and competitiveness (Festing et al., 2015), which makes career progression challenging for women.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The Nabdram District Assembly, like any other assembly in Ghana, plays a pivotal role in public service delivery and employment, making it a strategic location to examine how organizational and cultural factors mobility. Preliminary observations also indicated that although women were increasingly present in the workforce, their progression into leadership roles remained inconsistent. This made the Nabdram District relevant for exploring the barriers and opportunities shaping women's professional growth in local governance. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and they offered consent orally before taking part in the interviews (Brinkmann, 2022; Guillemin et al., 2018).

3.2 Research Approach

The qualitative research approach was deployed to deeply investigate the phenomenon of female employees' career progression in the Nabdram District in the Upper East Region of Ghana. A qualitative study emphasis on exploring the depth and richness of human experiences, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach allowed for a meaningful engagement with the complexities of the career progression of women in the Nabdram District with the aim to capture the subjective perspectives, perceptions, and social constructs that shape their professional journeys. This approach aligns with the interpretivism philosophy. Interpretivism, as noted by Creswell (2022), emphasizes the subjective nature of human experiences and recognizes that reality is socially constructed. This paradigm was particularly well-suited for exploring the complexities of women's career advancement, as it allowed for an in-depth examination of their lived experiences, perceptions, and the social constructs surrounding their careers. The subjective nature of career progression, influenced by cultural nuances and organizational contexts, makes interpretivism an apt choice for this study.

3.3 Research Design

The case study design, a methodological approach that allows for an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context, was deployed. As emphasized by Yin (2018), a case study design is particularly advantageous when the research aims to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its natural setting, providing a holistic and detailed understanding of the complexities involved. In the context of examining the career progression of women in the Nabdram District, the case study design enabled a focused investigation into the uniqueness of women's professional advancement within the local government sector in the Nabdram District. Given the localized nature of the



study area, the case study design was well-suited for capturing the dynamics of women's career progression within the Nabdam District. The case study design is rooted in the constructivist philosophy deployed to explore the experiences of female employees with career progression in the Nabdam District. The constructivist case study design aligns with the study's focus on meaning-making, contextual understanding and the socially constructed nature of career progression of female employees at the Nabdam District Assembly of the Ghana Local Government system. The various perspectives on the factors of motivation for career pursuit of females, their perspectives on career progression, and the milestones of career progression of female staff in the Nabdam District Assembly of female career progression were explored for purposes of understanding this critical issue of gender equity within the local government system of Ghana (Eisner, 2020). The guided enquiry session allowed participants to freely express their perspectives on the issues of female career progression in the Nabdam District of Ghana (Nussbaum, 2017).

3.4 Study Participants

The sample size for this study was 15 participants drawn from the 29 female employees in the Assembly. Both junior and senior female staff were included to obtain a comprehensive perspective on career advancement within the Assembly. These participants were considered valuable for this study because of their insight due to their employment in the Assembly and how they experienced career progression within the organisation of the period they worked with the Assembly as employees. In addition to the female participants, one male staff member, the Head of Human Resources (HR) was purposively engaged in a one-on-one interview. His inclusion was strategic to help confirm, contrast and contextualise the findings obtained from the female participants. As the officer responsible for managing recruitment, promotion and development processes, his perspectives provided a critical administrative lens through which to assess institutional practices and gender dynamics. This approach is intricately tied to a commitment to prioritizing the quality and depth of data over sheer quantity (Saunders et al., 2023).

The 15 participants were selected through the principle of data saturation, a concept commonly associated with qualitative research. Data saturation occurs when additional data collection no longer yields new insights or information, indicating that the research has achieved a sufficient depth of understanding regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Guest et al, 2006). Data saturation was reached on the 12th to 14th participants, where subsequent interviews did not provide any new emerging themes (Guest et al. 2022). As a result, the sample size obtained was fourteen (14), which aligns with the data saturation principle espoused by Constantinou et al. (2017) and Hennink & Kaiser (2022). The sampled participants provided rich information, which foregrounded the construction of knowledge on female employees' progression at the Nabdam District Assembly (Tisdell et al., 2025).

The purposive sampling technique, a non-probability method characterised by the intentional selection of participants based on specific criteria, was used to constitute the sample for the study. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to target female employees and the Head of Human Resources in the Nabdam District for gaining in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). In the context of exploring the career progression of women in the Nabdam District Office, purposive sampling is justified as it enabled the intentional selection of participants with diverse roles, experiences, and perspectives within the local government sector.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument and Trustworthiness

This study deployed semi-structured interviews as the main source of data. In this study, a semi-structured interview was used to gather detailed insights into the career progression experiences of women in the Nabdam District Office. Both senior and junior female staff members in the Nabdam District Office were selected for the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. These participants were chosen for their extensive experience and deep insights into career progression within the organization. The semi-structured format allowed for a guided conversation with the flexibility to explore participants' unique perspectives and experiences in depth. An interview guide was meticulously developed to facilitate the semi-structured interviews and ensure consistency and depth in the data collection process (Creswell, 2022). The interview lasted for about 45 to 60 minutes.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, participants were given the opportunity to review and validate their interview transcripts to ensure that their views were accurately captured. Probing questions were used during interviews to elicit deeper insights and reduce superficial responses. Reflexive notes were kept throughout the study to monitor the researcher's positionality and influence on the interpretation of data. In addition, participant quotes were used extensively to support the themes that emerged, reinforcing the objectivity and neutrality of the analysis. Through these measures, the study ensured a high level of trustworthiness, allowing the findings to offer credible and meaningful contributions to understanding how Social Studies education prepares students for the visible and hidden dimensions of university life.

3.6 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework was adapted to analyse the data. First, the



researchers engaged in familiarisation with the data by reading and re-reading all interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of participants' views. Notes were made on initial impressions and recurring ideas that appeared significant to the research questions. Secondly, initial codes were generated manually from the data. This involved systematically identifying and labelling key features in the transcripts that related to the motivations for females career pursuit with the Nabdram District Assembly, female employees career progression in the Assembly, and milestones of career progression within the Assembly as raised by participants. In the third phase, the codes were reviewed and grouped into potential themes. Similar codes were clustered together, and emerging themes were named based on the underlying ideas they represented. At this stage, themes were provisional and subject to revision.

The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes in relation to the coded data and the full data set to ensure coherence, relevance, and clarity. Some themes were merged or refined to avoid overlapping and to better represent the meanings embedded in the data. In the fifth phase, each theme was defined and clearly named. The researcher wrote analytical summaries that captured the essence of each theme and carefully connected the findings to the research objectives. The themes were refined until they offered a comprehensive explanation of the patterns observed. Finally, in the sixth phase, the themes were reported and supported with direct quotations from the participants.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participants' identities were protected, allowing them to respond without fear of being identified (Kaiser, 2022; Saunders et al., 2023). Additionally, participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions (Wiles et al., 2022). These measures ensured that the study was conducted with integrity and respect for the rights and privacy of participants, fostering a sense of trust and openness in their responses (Iphofen & Tolich, 2023).

IV. FINDING & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Findings

Outcomes from this study are presented on three themes including the motivations for female employees' pursuit of careers, female staff's perspectives on career progression, and the milestones in career progression in the Nabdram Assembly.

4.1.1 Female Employees' Motivations for Pursuing a Career in the Assembly

Appreciating the motivations of the female employees in the Assembly would help to understand the things that sustained their desires in the face of challenges and obstacles. The motivation of the female workers boarded on issues such as personal and family sustenance, service to humanity, self-fulfillment, and professional growth. A female staff had this to say:

I have the urge to contribute to shaping public policy, have a say in the direction of our services delivery. We have limited resources available to meet the many needs of the people in our society; some people must be in the front line at a time to take charge of decisions on how to effectively and appropriately utilize the resources. I am inspired by that need to keep working with the Assembly (Participant 12, Human Resource Dept., 7th September, 2024)

Another female staff had this to say:

"I continued working as an accountant with the Local Government because I have to be relevant; hence, I have to secure my future. I have a responsibility to take care of my children, my parents and myself. To be able to discharge this responsibility satisfactorily, I have to have a secured employment in an area that I render services to ordinary people on daily basis. In that way, I can earn income to help sustain my family, and the Local Government sector comes handy" (Participant 8, Accounts Dept., 7th September, 2024).

Another female staff indicated:

"I am inspired by my aunt who worked as an internal auditor in different Assemblies in the Local Government sector. I saw how respected she was, and I wanted to follow that path so that I will also contribute to projecting the image of the family in society. Besides, I also needed a job to take care of myself and support my family" (Participant 3, Internal Auditor Dept., 7th September, 2024).

An administration department staff said:

"I chose administration because I wanted to contribute to shaping public policy and make positive impact in society. The stability was appealing, yes, but it was more about having a say in the direction of our services. Career growth came as a bonus" (Participant 10, Administration Dept., 7th September, 2024).

The perspectives expressed by the female staff also reveal their motivations to pursue careers in the Assembly were for opportunities for financial stability, and personal fulfillment. This means that, to the female staff, their motivation to pursue their career meant having something to do and earn a living from to take care of themselves and their families. It can be ascertained from these views that, in the Nabdram area of Ghana, women play significant roles in providing for their families. The women do accept that caring for the economic, educational and health needs of

children is not just the duty of men. This diffuses the traditional notion that men are the providers of the family needs while women are for domestic responsibilities, a notion which has over the years served as a restriction to their access to education. This finding aligns with Nabi et al. (2018) report of women contributing to the food, security, and health needs of their families in Zimbabwe, childcare and nurturing (Chance & Abdoul, 2025; Lindvert et al., 2024; Schmidt et al., 2024). Again, an interesting element of the motivation for the pursuit of career was the desire to provide public services. This means, the female employees had a good appreciation of the work of Assemblies in providing goods and services at the grassroots level.

4.1.2 Female Staff in Nabdam District Perspectives on Career Progression

Female staff in the Nabdam District Assembly offered their perspectives on what career progression meant to them. To many of the female staff, career progression is not merely about titles, but a course towards competence and impact. A female staff had this to say:

“Career progression is not just about climbing through ranks or positions in the institution, but, the building on one’s knowledge, skills, and gaining satisfaction with the work. Career progression for me is about obtaining professional growth and personal fulfilment. It comes with new goals and new responsibilities regardless there is a change in rank or not.” (Participant 1, Administration Dept., 8th September, 2024).

“Some other female staff members in the District generally perceived career progression as an achievement through effort, perseverance, and navigating barriers. One female staff member expressed this as follows: Career progression means breaking barriers and overcoming challenges that come my way. It is about proving my capabilities and achieving recognition for my contributions” (Participant 2, Internal Audit Department, 8th September, 2024).

In the opinion of another female staff:

“It is about the opportunities to grow and advance within the organization. Career progression means having a clear path to move up the ranks and achieve higher positions through merit and hard work” (Participant 11, Accounts Department, 8th September, 2024).

The viewpoints as expressed by the female staff in the Nabdam District reveal some distinct perspectives on career progression. For many of the female staff, career progression meant professional growth but not necessarily climbing on the ladder of positions. From this standpoint, career progression is a hard-earned satisfaction often emanating from initiations self-initiated undertakings but not always the result of structured support from the Assembly. These perspectives reveal there is always a demand from female staff a sense of resilience, self-determination and strategic positioning.

This conceptualisation of career progression is at variance with the regular conceptualisations. It deviates from the description given by Van’t Foort-Diepeveen et al. (2017) that career progression is moving forward, being promoted, finding new challenges, new employers, new opportunities and getting the most out of one’s career. Similarly, it deviates from the notion that career progression involves steadily climbing the career ladder from the base to the apex in the profession by Gyansah and Guantai, (2018). Their conception of career progression has more to do with the individual; the individual finding new knowledge and skills to effectively balance professional and personal development and fulfilment. This conception of career progression by the female staff shares a reflection with Heller (2017) analysis that career progression described as a linear path in one’s career better suits men more than women employees.

Secondly, the perspectives on career progression by the female staff reflect the idea of work-life balance. It can be argued that their appreciation of career progression was largely influenced by their cultural environment, where the success of a female in career is to be seen or is to reflect in their abilities to obtain livelihood supports to discharge of their duties in the society especially to their family.

4.1.3 Milestones in Career Progression in Nabdam District

Female staff in the Nabdam District expressed opinions on the factors that enhanced their career progression trajectories within the Assembly. They indicated that diligence, learning new skills, and visibility to leadership were ingredients for progression in their career as female employees in the Assembly.

“Eventually, the results of my dedicated services got me noticed by my boss. Thereafter, my potentials were tapped for the growth of the organization. This was followed by more assignments and subsequently a promotion. But that came after a long period of remaining at the same position and delivering on my duties” (Participant 8, Budgetary Department, 8th September, 2024).

Another female staff also expressed an account of career progression for her in the District as follows:

“It was not long after I had completed the weekend program of study I signed up for in the university. I should say investing on furthering my education opened the doors to my promotion for me. Yes, that was how the doors opened for me” (Participant 9, Administration Department, 8th September, 2024).



Another female staff said:

“Despite only having a General Certificate Examination, Ordinary Level (GCE O’Level), I have been working in operations for 23 years and rose to become the Chief Radio Operator. It was not through formal training but through demonstrating consistent performance and reliability” (Participant 25, Operations Department, 8th September, 2024).

These accounts suggest that though female staff got promoted to higher ranks in their careers with the Assembly, personal initiatives, educational advancement, and consistent perseverance served as the fountain. As a result, many female staff expressed a desire for clearer guidance, mentorship, and structured induction programmes to aid their early progression. Others spoke of their promotions as gradual recognitions of accumulated experience, often informal, and dependent on visibility, informal networks, and recognition from superiors, rather than standardized performance metrics. Female staff had to contend with gender biases and navigate institutional politics by adopting hyper-resilient strategies. This reflects the “double bind” where women leaders are penalized for assertiveness yet viewed as weak when collaborative (Van’t Foort-Diepeveen et al., 2017; Izquierdo & Fabra, 2024). This support calls for mentorship and female role models (Izquierdo & Fabra, 2024; Lingappa & Rodrigues, 2023).

4.2 Discussion

The findings from this study present significant issues to enhance the issue of female staff progression, especially in the Nabdram District of the Local Government system of Ghana. Firstly, it emerged from the study that female staff’s desire to contribute to public service was a huge motivation for them in their career lives. This shows that in the face of many challenges, the desire to provide public service in service to humanity came across as an intrinsic motivation for their career pursuit. This shows that motivations evolve over time from the need for survival, care for family and security, to public service and legacy for the female staff in the Nabdram District. Unarguably, providing women with opportunities, coupled with their motivation to succeed in their chosen professions, provides society with benefits from their skills, knowledge, and contributions to the workforce. It also holds a huge potential for significant influence and change in the conduct of affairs in the local government system of Ghana. The career motivations of the female staff in the Nabdram District was largely influenced by their cultural environment that sees the success of a woman measured in the achievements or successes they make in performance of their responsibilities as mother and wives. As Lingappa and Rodrigues (2023) would argue, modification in social norms, access to education, improved technology, and contemporary fertility options available to women have reshaped them from performing traditional roles in family care to contributing significantly to broader society at regional and international levels. Women in contemporary times have arisen to task of exerting their relevance in local, national and international spaces dismantling stereotype gender roles and expectations that subscribe them to domestic family roles.

The perspectives on career motivation by the female staff in the Nabdram District reflect the Career Motivation theory by London and Noe (1997), which accentuates that a person’s career identity is integral to their self-concept and Campbell and Pritchard’s (2016), assertion that career motivations are shaped by individuals’ expectations about future outcomes such as recognition, societal impact or personal fulfillment. The desire in women to play central role in public leadership, service provision, resource management and change stories motivated the female staff in the local government system in Nabdram. This is attributable to the influence of formal education, modernization and the realities of the demands of survival in contemporary times. This development is appreciated when viewed from earlier studies that indicate that social, cultural, and economic barriers that obstructed female employees’ career successes (Ali & Mahmood, 2018; Gyansah & Guantai, 2018; Obimpeh, 2018).

Though career progression is a reality in the Nabdram District, it only actualizes for individual female staff who have gone out of the regular schedules to take on some self-assigned tasks and demonstrate abilities of success. This position presents career progression as a product of self-driven resilience and adroit navigations of institutional policies. It is hereby concluded that the female staff saw career progression as a survivalist approach to career advancement (Evetts, 2000). Nonetheless, female staff face a lot of challenges in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities (Budig & Misra, 2010; Koekemoer, et al., 2023). This corresponds with Izquierdo & Fabra (2024), position that women face personal barriers, such as balancing family and work and systemic challenges at their places of work in the attempt to progress. Meanwhile, relying on individual resilience for career progression in the local government system will place huge responsibility on female staff to adapt (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2015; Ahmad et al., 2024).

Furthermore, it has emerged from the perspectives of the female staff in the Nabdram District that personal ambition is a key driver for female staff, especially those who associate career progression with professional growth and increased visibility. However, female staff’s personal ambitions are often hindered by systemic challenges. To the female staff, unclear promotion pathways and insufficient mentorship opportunities limit their ability to convert ambition into actual career advancement. This aligns with research findings that while women’s career motivations are strong, they often clash with structural obstacles (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2015); Ahmad et al., 2024; Koekemoer et al.,

2023). For example, personal resilience and grit are important for overcoming workplace difficulties, yet their impact depends largely on the availability of institutional support (Pillay-Naidoo & Vermeulen, 2024).

In addition, there is a disconnect between formal institutional policies and informal workplace practices in the Nabdam District Assembly relative to career progression for females. It can be deduced from the female staff perspectives that although promotion procedures exist, informal networks and departmental biases influence more when it comes to female staff progression in the Nabdam District Assembly. This holds a significant potential to override merit-based advancement. This situation mirrors the observations in public administration where formal hierarchies coexist with informal power structures that disadvantage women (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2015). For instance, De Widt and Panagiotopoulos (2018) found that informal networking in local government settings often leads to exclusionary practices, especially when decision-making circles are dominated by entrenched male groups.

This work highlights two main perceptions of career barriers by female staff in the Nabdam District. While some tend to attribute stagnation to systemic issues like unclear promotion criteria, others contend that interpersonal challenges such as office politics serve more as barriers to career progression for women. This contrast echoes broader gender studies debates, where younger women see external structural factors as primary obstacles, whereas older cohorts internalise these as personal challenges (Ahmad et al., 2024; Izquierdo & Fabra, 2024). These differing perspectives underscore the need for comprehensive interventions addressing both institutional and interpersonal gender biases. Women's career progression issues are unique and dynamic in the Nabdam District of the local government system. According to Nabi et al. (2018), career progression is a key concern for women in the workplace due to the fact that they often have to battle with issues such as personal goals, professional skills, organizational support and culture (Gunawardane & Lobo, 2019); gender inequalities (Wirth, 2015); and the lack of mentorship and networks (Higgins & Kram, 2001) that limit their capacities to advance in the careers.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study on women's career progression at the Nabdam District Assembly reveals persistent structural, institutional and socio-cultural barriers that limit women's upward mobility, particularly into senior and technical roles. Despite an increasing number of women attaining bachelor's degrees and demonstrating ambition and resilience, their advancement remains hindered by opaque promotion systems, limited access to mentorship and professional development, entrenched gender biases and a lack of representation in decision-making and technical departments.

This work reinforces and extends the concept of intersectionality as a source of hindrance to career progress for female staff in the Ghanaian public sector, showing how institutional, cultural, and individual factors account for the literal exclusion of females from career progression within the Nabdam District Assembly of the Ghana local government system. This places gender inequality as a product of both structural and agency-related dynamics. The findings from this study also underscore the importance of organizational culture and informal networks, which theories increasingly recognizes as central to understanding women's career trajectories.

5.2 Recommendation

Practically, the study points to the urgent need for institutional reforms within the Nabdam District as well as other Assemblies. These include implementing structured mentorship programs, transparent and merit-based promotion criteria, and regular gender-sensitization training for leadership. Affirmative action mechanisms must be enforced to address systemic imbalances, particularly in technical and senior roles. Work-life balance policies and recognition systems should be mainstreamed to support women's dual roles and enhance retention and motivation. For the broader public sector and related industries, the findings signal that gender equity is not only a matter of social justice but also of organizational effectiveness. The study contributes to the growing body of empirical evidence on gender disparities in Africa's public sector, offering context-specific insights from the Nabdam District of Ghana. In all, the study demonstrates that advancing women's careers in Ghana's public sector requires a dual approach: robust institutional reforms and deliberate cultural change. Only by addressing both structural and attitudinal barriers can organizations create an equitable and supportive environment where women can fully realize their leadership potential. The implications extend beyond the Nabdam District Assembly, offering a blueprint for similar institutions seeking to translate gender equity policies into tangible progress.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.



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