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Glass ceiling in Nigeria's banking sector: perspectives of senior male employees

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines senior male employees' perspectives on glass ceiling in the Nigerian banking sector.

Methodology: The data were collected qualitatively using interviews with 43 senior male employees in four Nigerian banks.

Findings: This study finds that senior male employees acknowledge the challenges their female counterparts face concerning promotion. Senior male employees' views on the value of gender-diverse leadership underscore the illusion of a 'level playing field' because of a gender-neutral performance policy and a family-friendly policy for women. Nonetheless, the study notes a divergence in senior male employees' perspectives about the professional progression of female employees (based majorly on age and ethnicity). Our study concludes that the organisational culture and leadership that underpin poor female career progression are embedded in and driven by the culture in our empirical context.

Originality: Our examination of senior male employees' perspectives on glass ceiling in the Nigerian banking sector offers significant theoretical and practical contributions to the extant literature on gendered occupational segregation by providing unique insights into how patriarchal societal and occupational culture, as well as (limited) family-friendly policies for women, influence the configuration of men's views of gendered occupational segregation in the Nigerian banking sector

Keywords: Culture, discriminatory practices, glass ceiling, Nigeria, perceptions, senior male employees

Introduction

The term 'glass ceiling' refers to discriminatory barriers that limit female employees from advancing to higher positions of authority in the workplace simply because they are women (Babic and Hansez, 2021; Noor et al., 2023). Glass ceiling is based on socio-cognitive evaluations that use gender beliefs and social relationships to limit career advancement for specific genders (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). Socio-cognitive evaluations are informed by societal or organisational norms that continue to define who men and women are by associating certain traits and roles with them, which has resulted in discrimination against women (Davies-Netzley, 1998).

The pattern of glass ceiling in Nigeria – and, by extension, other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) – correlates with what is obtainable globally (Ntuli and Kwenda, 2020). However, there is increased awareness of the problem in Nigeria and in SSA, and this has led to some progress in eradicating glass ceiling challenges through government institutions and policies, such as the introduction of quotas for appointing women to leadership roles and the setting up of committees to explore ways of mitigating the barriers faced by women in their career progression (Ajala, 2016). Nevertheless, the problem is perceived to be more intense in developing countries than it is in Western countries. A recent study undertaken in SSA found that men are favoured for certain roles compared to women, regardless of the qualifications and experience of the women, suggesting that there is a high prevalence of labour-market discrimination against women (Obioma et al., 2022). Consequently, Ntuli and Kwenda (2020) call for a more informed diagnosis of glass ceiling problem in SSA by using a dataset that extends what is currently available and an analytical method that allows for a deeper understanding of why the problem persists. More recently, Taparia and Lenka (2022) as well as Bülbül (2021) agree with this suggestion, adding that there is a need for more (qualitative) research to provide an understanding of the contexts sustaining glass ceilings in developing economies.

Our qualitative study, therefore ,attempts to address this gap by investigating the views of men assumed to benefit from sociocultural systems of inequality in Nigeria in order to further understand the concept of glass ceiling as it applies in this context. Frkal and Criscione-Naylor (2020) have called for more research on men's perception of glass ceiling for female professionals to gain more insight into the concept. Addressing gender equality must include

many more male voices, as it is difficult for men to discuss gender inequality (Gray, 2013). Only a limited number of studies (Ibarra et al., 2010; Manwa, 2014, Tijani-Adenle, 2019) have examined male employees' perspectives on glass ceiling for women in industry (Frkal and Criscione-Naylor, 2020). Male and female employees have identified work-family conflict as a major cause of glass ceiling problems in the SSA region (Manwa, 2014; Tijani-Adenle, 2019) but disagree concerning the role of a lack of family-friendly policies and approaches to equitable promotion (Manwa, 2014).

While understanding women's career challenges based on men's perceptions may be difficult, we argue that there is a theoretical and practical justification for what we can learn from such a study (Gray, 2013). Accordingly, we uncovered four themes underpinning men's views about glass ceiling:

1. stereotypical perceptions driven by societal values and beliefs;
2. organisation-level interpersonal perceptions due to a lack of female leadership available to facilitate the promotion of women;
3. organisation-level situational perceptions evidenced by family-friendly policies and a performance culture have led to the illusion of a 'level playing field' in relation to the opportunities that are available for women to advance their careers; and
4. age and ethnicity, which accounted for the differences in the views of the interviewed men about glass ceiling in the Nigerian banking sector.

Understanding glass ceiling from men's perspectives thus sheds light on the intellectual puzzle of why women continue to face barriers to career progression, regardless of the efforts being made to address the problem, particularly in developing countries (Vohlídalová, 2020). Such an understanding can inform the development of practical recommendations that can, in turn, aid in the development of ideas on how to address the age-long glass ceiling challenge (Gray, 2013). Our study is novel in that it highlights the role of men in the production and reproduction of barriers to the advancement of women's careers due to the entrenchment of societal and organizational cultures that privilege men's professional labour ahead of those of women. Thus, we address the following research questions:

1. What are the opinions of senior male employees in the Nigerian banking sector regarding glass ceiling for women in the industry?
2. What factors determine how senior male employees perceive glass ceilings for women

in the Nigerian banking sector?

Glass ceiling

Existing studies suggest that the demographic population that is most affected by glass ceiling is women (Yanadori et al., 2016). Men (primarily white men) are likely to earn more pay, receive greater benefits, and be offered more opportunities for promotion into managerial roles than women (Valet, 2018). Notwithstanding the clear benefits of gender-diverse leadership – such as improved decision-making, innovation, and firm performance (McKinsey, 2020) – female employees are less likely to be promoted to senior managerial positions than men. This is the case regardless of their level of education, training, experience, and skills, and it is the case despite the value they can add to the organisation (Thomas-Hunt and Phillips, 2004).

Antecedents of glass ceiling: a theoretical underpinning

Our study uses Elacqua et al.'s (2009) differentiated treatment model to explain the stereotypical perceptions (driven by interpersonal and situational factors) that negatively impact female employees in the workplace. Stereotypical perception is informed partly by social role theory, which holds that individuals form perceptions of descriptive and prescriptive gender-role expectations of the behaviour of others, which is rooted in the evolutionary gender-based division of labour (Eagly and Wood, 2012). Regarding the division of labour, many cultures or societies generally consider men as the breadwinners and women as the homemakers (Eagly and Wood, 2012; Jaggar, 1983). As homemakers (with significant home or family commitments), it is difficult for most women to demonstrate the outstanding performance required for promotion in many organisations without adequate organisational support (Tijani-Adenle, 2019). Moreover, based on these social roles, the expectation is that by default, women's behaviour is communal, relationship oriented, and nurturing relative to men. Men are expected to display a high level of confidence while being more agentic, opinionated, and independent. The direct link between agentic traits and men is based on traditional leadership stereotypes (Adisa et al., 2021; Tijani-Adenle, 2019).

Consistent with the interpersonal perspective, Elacqua et al. (2009) theorise that informal networks and mentoring are relevant for career advancement. Ibarra et al. (2010) suggest that women's need for a high-level organisational mentor is inimical to their career progression. Employees supported by a mentor are more likely to be promoted and kept informed about promotional opportunities (Babic and Hansez, 2021). The findings of recent studies suggest

that social and cultural barriers in some developing countries in Africa limit women's education and confidence to aspire to leadership positions, which reduces the number of women in leadership positions who can then serve as mentors (Mathur-Helm, 2006).

From the perspective of situational factors, Elacqua et al. (2009) conclude that organisational promotion practices are key problems associated with glass ceiling. For example, promotion criteria are more related to job performance and more severe for female line managers (with homes and families to manage) than they are for their male counterparts. Of course, female employees are generally more sensitive to the idea of using performance-related criteria designed by men, who have a limited understanding of women's lives, for promotion purposes (Babic and Hansez, 2021; Mathur-Helm, 2006). Consequently, female employees who perceive that they are not treated fairly compared to their male colleagues in performance evaluations are likely to report a glass ceiling problem (Ibarra et al., 2010).

Accordingly, female employees argue that the family-friendly policies available are limited because of the long working hours and performance-based organisational culture (driven by societal culture) prevalent in organisations in SSA (Manwa, 2014; Tijani-Adenle, 2019). This perspective is different for senior male employees who assume that the 12 weeks maternity leave policies and a one-hour late resumption or one-hour early closure that women bankers are permitted have demonstrated support for the career progression of such women (Awuor, 2018). In reality, the opposite is the case because women without solid support networks like nannies/caregivers, mothers and sisters or female in-laws who assist in caring for their kids experience significant challenges, impacting their career progression.

The Nigerian context

The context of this study contributes to its importance. Nigeria has diverse community beliefs and traditional systems (Pepple and Davies, 2019). The country is communal in that societies expect individuals and extended families to share responsibilities (Tijani-Adenle, 2019). This clannish orientation sets Nigeria and SSA countries apart from the West (Oseghale et al., in press). For example, Nigerians expect elders to be called 'aunties' and 'uncles', regardless of their relationship with a younger person. Another distinctive feature of the Nigerian context is a gender imbalance. There is a societal expectation that women should be subservient to men, making it difficult for women to attain similar heights as men, regardless of their qualifications (Uwakwe, 2004). Men have continued to benefit from this society-wide orientation, hence the

need for a study exploring the male perspectives of women's experience of glass ceiling in the industry, particularly in the Nigerian banking sector

The ethnic diversity in Nigeria has significant implications for understanding how men view the progression of women into senior roles in the country. Existing studies suggest different cultural nuances underpinning the dominant cultures (Okonkwo, 2013). As such, the views of men from different cultures concerning women vary (Olanipekun and Onabanjo, 2000). Furthermore, culturally informed views in the empirical context are deeply held and transgenerational (Okonkwo, 2013). Consequently, the younger generation of men are likely to hold views different from their fathers and ancestors due to differences in age and, thus, contexts or realities.

At the organisational level, there is evidence that an increasing number of Nigerian women are venturing into various fields, including fields traditionally deemed masculine, such as the military, engineering, and politics (Dogo, 2014). Nigerian women's access to education and training has continued to improve, providing many with the requisite qualifications to aspire to work in senior managerial positions (Dogo, 2014). Nevertheless, there has always been potentially discriminatory treatment favouring male employees, making Nigerian women less influential than their male counterparts (Uwakwe 2004). Women with similar skills to their male counterparts are generally overlooked when opinions are sought (Dogo, 2014).

There are few Nigerian women in leadership positions in industries like construction, banking, telecommunications, aviation, oil, gas, manufacturing, and mining because of the masculine and power-distance culture in operation in the country (Obioma et al., 2022). Consequently, Nigerian society stresses different expectations for men and women, leading to stereotypical behaviours and feelings that women may not be treated equally to men (Obioma et al., 2022).

The stereotype-based behaviour of Nigerian society underpins the gendered nature of the Nigerian labour market. For example, in a female-dominated profession, such as teaching, women do a great deal of teaching and administrative roles, while there are many female school principals. In comparison, Nigerian men occupy more senior administrative roles. Similarly, in hospitals, doctors and heads of departments are often men, while nursing and support roles are dominated by women (Obamiro and Obasan, 2013). The situation is the same for women in the banking and finance sectors. For example, the results of a survey conducted by Women in Business in Nigeria showed that women occupy 26% and 16% of managerial and board

positions, respectively in Nigerian banks (Wimbiz, 2014). These numbers do not meet the Central Bank of Nigeria's requirement of Nigerian banks to have a minimum quota representation of 40% and 30% of women in managerial and board positions, respectively (Ajala, 2016).

Overall, the research on glass ceiling suggests that men consider family-friendly policies (including family support systems in developing countries) as adequate for supporting women's career progression, notwithstanding the gender-biased culture (Manwa, 2014; Tijani-Adenle, 2019). The female voice in the literature disagrees, arguing that long working hours limit the benefits associated with family-friendly policies and that not all women can take advantage of family support systems in developing countries or can afford household assistance to address the imbalance created by the gender-biased culture (Manwa, 2014; Tijani-Adenle, 2019).

Methods

In this study, we adopted the qualitative research design in order to understand senior male employees' perspectives on the barriers to the progression of female employees in the banking sector. The qualitative method provides an in-depth understanding of evolving and complex social phenomena and is widely used in glass ceiling studies (Mashele and Alagidede, 2022). Before the sampling and data collection, the researchers obtained ethical approval to undertake the study from a UK university.

We carried out semi-structured interviews using the Skype video-call application. The semi-structured interview method enables researchers to probe research participants in line with their responses to the interview questions in order to understand the research problem in depth (Oseghale et al., 2022). Interviews were conducted from March–October 2021, and each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour in length. Our initial interview questions addressed the interviewees' demographic profiles. The average age of the participants was 42–64 years old. They were top executives in the selected banks – divisional, regional, or executive directors. The average number of years it had taken them to reach that position in their organisations ranged between 8 and 15 years. In terms of their origins, 40% were from South-Eastern Nigeria, 20% were from Southern Nigeria, 30% were from Northern Nigeria, and 10% were from South-Western Nigeria. The participants' ages, years of employment, and ethnicities all suggest that they were knowledgeable adults who had experienced the Nigerian context and

would have a good understanding of how national culture and interpersonal and situational factors influence glass ceiling concept as it relates to women in their respective organisations. With their experience, these male employees have progressed to senior-management roles and have worked with female colleagues who have not progressed at the same pace in comparison to men due to glass ceiling. Therefore, the information from these participants provides a rich source for understanding senior male employees' perspectives on glass ceiling as it relates to women in the banking industry in Nigeria.

We also asked the participants to describe their perceptions of the interpersonal and situational factors that affect the progression of female employees. We asked follow-up questions on certain issues that emerged during the interview discussions to offset any limitations associated with using the semi-structured interview schedule. The third author, who conducted the interviews, ceased interviewing participants when data saturation had been achieved (Saunders et al., 2018). There was no new information at this point, and it became clear that more interviews were unlikely to add value to the data. We recorded the interviews in order to facilitate the data analysis – with the approval of the participants. We interviewed the participants individually in order to enhance confidentiality, which enabled the interviewees to answer candidly about their views on glass ceiling experienced by female employees in the Nigerian banking sector (Saunders et al., 2018).

We used a convenience sampling technique for selecting the investigated banks and participants. We initially contacted ten banks for this study through the third author's contact at the Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria. Four banks agreed to participate in the study. Our contact's role was limited to simply introducing us to the branch managers. Thus, reducing the likelihood of bias. The bank managers permitted us to directly contact senior male employees who were working in their branches for the interviews. Ultimately, 43 participants from the four chosen banks were purposively selected for interview. The participants were drawn from the finance, ICT, human resources, operations, and general administration departments at the selected banks. We further used a purposive sampling technique to identify the senior male employees (those occupying managerial roles and above) in the selected banks (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002). We used the purposive sampling technique to ensure that only senior managers that were most likely to provide relevant information on the subject formed the sample for the study.

A theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse our data. This method allowed us to carry out a detailed analysis of the data in order to provide insights into the research questions that we set to address our research objectives. This type of data analysis utilises a priori coding, which involves the development of codes based on a prior literature review (Nunes and Al-Mamari, 2008). While this coding approach has been criticised for inhibiting innovation, the benefits of the approach outweigh this limitation (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). For example, a priori coding helps to reduce data complexity by supporting the development of relevant codes and theoretical saturation (Pepple, 2022).

Our analysis involved four stages (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002). First, we familiarised ourselves with the data by listening to the audio recordings of the interviews and repeatedly reading the interview transcripts to gain insights into the data we had collected. Second, when reading the transcripts and the notes made therefrom, we developed the initial codes, which involved collating the relevant text excerpts for each code. Third, the relevant text segments of the collated text associated with the codes were read repeatedly in order to develop broad themes (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002). Fourth and finally, these themes were later merged into themes that were narrow enough to encapsulate the recurrent issues in the data after we had refined the specifics of each theme. Interesting themes emerged at this stage, such as stereotypical perceptions (glass ceiling: the influence of society and culture on organisational culture), interpersonal perceptions (glass ceiling and organisational culture), situational perceptions (glass ceiling and organisational culture – family-friendly policies and performance culture as facilitators of the illusion of the 'level playing field'), and male employees' ages and ethnicities and their perspectives on glass ceiling for female employees.

All authors were involved in the data analysis in joint-coding meetings. The first and second authors independently read and coded the transcripts, and the third author served as a judge. Three scenarios occurred after we had read any given text excerpt in each transcript: 1. no codes were placed on the text; 2. only one author marked a particular code on the text; and 3. both the first and second authors marked a particular code on the text. The individual who did not code the text with a given code would need to reread the passage in situation 2. The passage was coded accordingly if the individual agreed. The third author was independent of the process if a consensus was not reached between the first and second authors. The overall percentage of agreement between the two coders was 87%, above the suggested threshold of 70% (Cohen, 1960).

Findings

We identified four themes in our data about the stereotypical, situational, and interpersonal perceptions that characterised senior male employees' views (depending on their age and ethnicity) about glass ceiling. In particular, the interviewed men's views were premised on the illusion that family-friendly policies and a high-performance culture provided a 'level playing field' in the Nigerian banking sector. We discuss these themes below.

Stereotypical perception: Glass ceiling – the influence of society and culture on organisational culture

The interviews with the participants – senior male employees – revealed that promotions in the banks studied were strictly based on meeting key performance indicators (based on outstanding performance) – regardless of gender and depending on the department carrying out the performance appraisal. The interviewees also attested to the challenges female employees may face in trying to fulfil these key performance indicators while playing the domestic roles assigned to them by society. Thus, our findings suggest that the boundary between organisational culture and societal culture is indistinct in Nigeria. Senior male employees appreciate that it could be challenging for female employees to gain promotions to more senior managerial roles because of the unfavourable organisational culture driven by Nigeria's highly masculine societal culture. The responses below highlight the stereotypical responses of senior male employees about glass ceiling as it relates to women, which are informed by societal values.

> *Glass ceiling is based on the demands of the woman to be there for her family because of the nature of Nigerian society, which makes [promotion] quite challenging. I think it is because of the women's commitments outside of work, like their family pressures, that it is difficult for women to take control of their careers and progress to senior positions.* (Participant 10)

Consistent with the views of the interviewed senior male employees, these societal values and beliefs create a systemic organisational culture that tends to limit female line managers in terms of promoting them to leadership positions. Another senior male employee stated:

> *Promotion of female employees is difficult because of the culture in the organisation is mainly influenced by societal belief that expects women to be submissive to men* (Participant 11)

This view confirms the impact of societal values and beliefs about the domestic role of women in society on the performance-driven organisational culture. As such a culture is prevalent in the banks, female employees continue to face systemic discrimination that makes it challenging to balance work and family, thus limiting their career progression. The stereotypical perspective has resulted in an agentic culture (gendered occupational segregation). We found that female employees progressed more in customer-relations roles, which contributed to the domination of male employees in other leadership roles. The quotes below reflect this agentic culture:

> *There are exceptions, though, when it comes to recruitment for customer service. The preference is for females. Although we try to recruit and retain the best-performing staff. The truth is that at the top, it is still a man's world, as there are still so many men up there. However, in recent times, there have been several promotions of females to top positions.* (Participant 5)

In some instances, owing to the time that women take from work on maternity leave, the career trajectory of female employees is negatively impacted. One of the senior male employees demonstrated this perspective as follows:

> *The stress involved [in holding a leadership position] and family commitments make it difficult for women to progress to such a position. The women who might succeed at that level are divorcées or single women. This is because sometimes, the hours involved are not suitable for a woman who has a husband and children, especially [with] Nigeria being a patriarchal society.* (Participant 41)

Interpersonal perceptions: Glass ceiling and organisational culture

Males are in the majority of the sampled organisations, which explains why the organisational culture in these organisations is very agentic. We found an apparent lack of support (mentorship) and consideration of the unique situations female employees could face in their careers. One of the interviewed managers asserted:

Women in leadership positions influence the growth of other women, so this [lack of women leaders] may be why other women still do not get promoted... There are similar hurdles that certain women might face. For instance, women of childbearing age will face challenges that might impact their career progression or even their career as a whole. (Participant 12)

The above statement suggests that senior male managers understand and acknowledge the issues their female counterparts face because of their gender and the role a male dominated workforce plays in limiting female employees career progression.

Situational perceptions: Glass ceiling and organisational culture (family-friendly policies and the performance culture as facilitators of the illusion of the 'level playing field')

The male managers interviewed believed that although the masculine organisational culture, influenced by a societal perspective about women, puts female employees in a difficult position concerning promotion, family-friendly policies and a strong performance culture in the banking sector provide a 'level playing field' for all employees to develop their careers. Two male managers asserted:

Flexible working options are available for female employees who have a family from which they can benefit, despite an organisational culture that mostly supports men to succeed. Apart from maternity leave, they are allowed to go for antenatal and doctor's visits during their pregnancies and are allowed to arrive late to work or [finish] early on any of those days, but they still get paid in full. (Participant 19)

I believe that we are doing enough to support women to overcome the limitations emanating from women's positions in society and the male-dominated work environment by implementing family-friendly policies for women. For example, women can take three months maternity leave and still earn full pay. (Participant 37)

These views evidence the practices that negatively impact the career progression of women. The participants argued that with the effective management of maternity leave and other family-friendly policies that are available to women, women can perform and enjoy similar opportunities for promotion to their male counterparts in the banking sector. The senior

managers interviewed stated that the performance culture in the banking sector in Nigeria creates a 'level playing field' for all employees, despite situational factors (influenced by the agentic culture) that are damaging to the career progression of their female counterparts.

Interestingly, while the culture of banks in Nigeria advocates meritocracy, both male and female employees experience similarly intense pressure to perform and meet set targets without considering their family commitments and other challenges associated with their gender. The senior male employees interviewed argued that this provides a 'level playing field' for all to thrive and achieve their goals. A senior manager argued:

> *I do not necessarily think there is an issue with female employees' career progression because I believe it is a fair playing ground for everyone. It is all down to the individual... I think it is a level playing ground because it is all performance-driven, in contrast to the civil service, where a certain percentage, about 40% of the board, has to be female. It is not quota-based...*
>
> *Gender only comes into play regarding where a woman is posted. If the environment is not female-friendly, especially in some northern states, they will reconsider posting a woman to a specific location.* (Participant 9)

Male employees' ages and ethnicities and their perspectives on glass ceiling for female employees

Notably, the participants' views differed according to age and ethnicity. While the responses were generally similar, younger employees were more sympathetic to the challenges faced by female employees, suggesting that millennials and not baby boomers can better address glass ceiling challenges. A senior male employee below 50 years of age observed:

> *I think there is still room for women to play more roles. I think more could be done to support women, especially the highflyers.* (Participant 6)

Older male senior employees felt that their organisations were doing enough to support the progression of female employees. They also saw little value in increasing gender diversity in the banking sector leadership. One older senior male employee (over 50 years old) said:

> *It is not necessarily the bank that does not want to maximise women's potential but the women also have a part to play. For instance, if the woman is on*

> *maternity leave and does not push herself to be relevant, how can her potential*
> *be fully maximised?* (Participant 9)

Male employees' views towards female employees' challenges when seeking promotion also differ according to ethnicity. Although the overall cultural orientation of the country favours men over women, senior male employees from northern Nigeria seemed to use stronger emotive words than participants from other areas to explain the reason for the non-progression of female employees. Compared to other ethnicities in Nigeria, northern employees suggested that the rise of women threatened the position of men. Employees from the southeastern region were more interested in the submissiveness of women, while the southwestern regions were interested in women's family commitments. These views are captured in the following quotes:

> *Definitely…women are pretty competitive, and once they set their minds to it,*
> *there is no stopping them… What will happen to the men?* (Participant 15, from
> northern Nigeria)

> *Yes, there are stereotypes, as the general belief is that if a woman rises to a top*
> *position, she no longer becomes submissive.* (Participant 17, from south-eastern
> Nigeria)

> *…. women have their peculiarities, and it might affect how they are approached*
> *and perceived. A case in point is when it pertains to maternity leave and needing*
> *time off work.* (Participant 13, from south-western Nigeria)

Thus, all the male participants – from all parts of the country – seemed to rationalise the barriers that negatively influence the progression of female employees, consistent with societal values and beliefs. However, the younger male employees seemed to be more sympathetic to the challenges facing women in this regard.

Discussion

Our findings are consistent with those of prior research (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Manwa, 2014) on glass ceiling in a similar context. For example, research has found that organisations in African countries with firmly held agentic views have organisational cultures reflecting such societal values and beliefs (Adisa et al., 2021; Tijani-Adenle, 2019). Consistent with the agentic views, we found that some leaders of Nigerian banks view female employees as only fit for

specific roles, such as in customer relations and not in leadership (Enyinna et al., 2018). This may be why female employees in leadership positions are fewer than their male counterparts (Uwakwe, 2004).

We also found that the attributes of female employees, such as their age and family commitments, impacted their ability to progress into senior roles in the Nigerian banking sector. These findings are consistent with the findings of Kim and Gong (2017) that female employees are negatively impacted in terms of their career progression because of their family commitments. While existing theories suggest that society, organisational culture, and organisational leadership independently influence the perceptions of women's career progression (Eagly and Wood, 2012), our findings indicate that organisational culture and leadership are embedded in and driven by societal culture. This finding confirms and extends the literature on men's perspectives on women's experience of glass ceiling by providing insights into how societal culture and organisational culture intersect to determine men's views about women's experience of the banking industry (Taparia and Lenka, 2022).

From an interpersonal perspective, we found that the lack of a substantial number of female leaders has led to a lack of leadership support and mentors for female employees who are seeking to progress to upper-management positions in banks. Studies have shown that having senior female employees may influence organisational culture (Davies-Netzley, 1998) positively in order to support opportunities for female employees to be promoted in banks in many developing countries, including countries in SSA. Studies have shown that organisational cultures in male-dominated work environments often do not consider the work-home conflicts that women face (Babic and Hansez, 2021; Chikapa, 2021; Mathur-Helm, 2006) when designing their policies on promotions.

Our findings also show how family-friendly policies and performance culture, bolstered by societal culture, further exacerbate glass ceiling problem in line with the situational perspective. Despite acknowledging the challenges women face in trying to progress in their careers, there was an illusion of a level-playing field created via family-friendly policies; thus, there is an emphasis on merit-based performance requirements for career progression for all employees. Organisational culture in the banking sector is often criticised for putting too much pressure on employees to perform highly (Orbih and Imhonopi, 2019). Extant studies suggest that banks in Nigeria often put too much emphasis on reaching targets (related to getting clients

to deposit money to the banks) in order to achieve recapitalisation and on competition with other banks (Orbih and Imhonopi, 2019).

These findings contradict the female perspectives on the role of family-friendly policies and the merit-based performance culture in relation to the prevalence of glass ceiling. For example, research shows that female employees do not view their organisations as having a 'level playing field' (Williams et al., 2012). As such, there appears to be a difference between how men and women perceive the equal opportunity stands of organisations (Ibarra et al., 2010). Female employees believe that the long working hours in the banking sector, which support the high-performance culture, make the benefits of any family-friendly policies redundant (Manwa, 2014). Of course, family-friendly policies such as maternity leave may give female employees time to nurse their babies to a certain age before they resume work. However, family-friendly policies such as maternity leave or time off for check-ups may not accommodate the long working hours that female employees must work upon their return. Evidence suggests that female employees are generally not in favour of using performance-related criteria for promotion (Babic and Hansez, 2021) in such environments.

The above views also highlight the challenges women face in contemporary organisations with performance-focused organisational cultures, supported by unhelpful family-friendly policies, and they further emphasises that organisations may be insensitive to the plight of female employees (Williams et al., 2012) because of this illusion of a 'level playing field'. Most male employees have been promoted over their female counterparts in the banking sector (Mathur-Helm, 2006) because they do not have childrearing and home-keeping responsibilities, and so they are favoured with promotions to senior or management level positions. Additionally, senior male employees' view of a 'level playing field' sheds light on why the issue of glass ceiling may be prevalent for a long time, as these males seem to be comfortable with the performance-driven culture that is in operation in their organisations.

According to our findings, the ethnicity of senior male employees plays a significant role in how they perceive the advancement of female employees. This is another significant contribution to the extant literature, as ethnicity – not only country of origin – contributes to stereotypes about gender (Obioma et al., 2022). We found that employees from northern Nigeria were mostly influenced by their cultural and religious views, according to which women are expected to stay at home (Ukiwo, 2005). Hence, their view is that organisations may not want to progress female employees in branches located in Northern Nigeria. Senior

employees from the eastern part of the country suggested that progressing women into leadership positions may make them less submissive. This finding highlights the patriarchal culture that is prevalent in the region and extends current theory by reaffirming how cultural beliefs influence organisational and institutional barriers to women's progression (Adisa et al., 2021).

We also found that although both younger and older male employees felt that their organisations were doing enough to support the career progression of female colleagues, younger male employees were more sympathetic to the plight of their female counterparts. Thus, it is noteworthy that a possible solution to the issue of glass ceiling in organisations may require more engagement with younger male employees. For example, having a gender diverse selection committee including younger senior male employees may help to reduce the issue of glass ceiling.

Recommendations

Our findings have key practical implications. First, we recommend that female bankers are allowed to work from home if banks can ensure that doing so does not jeopardise the security of customers' funds or the banks' interests.

Second, we make the case for improved policies at organisational and national levels that may make it easier for women – especially in the banking sector – to cope better with work-life balance such that it does not affect their career progression. For example, organisations can provide opportunities for child support or day-care facilities to support women who are working the long hours required to succeed in the sector (Gray, 2013; Taparia and Lenka, 2022), regardless of the family-support system that is prevalent in many developing countries, since not all female employees can access this support (Tijani-Adenle, 2019).

For governments and regulatory bodies, we recommend the implementation of existing National Gender Policy aimed at creating greater opportunities for women in society to support the reorientation of the national culture. Although some progress has been made in this regard, much needs to be done to change how society views women's roles.

Finally, however, female employees are encouraged to be proactive so that they are not deemed to be insignificant (Gray, 2013) by taking up promotion opportunities as they become available – regardless of society's views. To support this effort, human-resources teams must learn to

organise events at which female employees are encouraged and supported to apply for promotions.

Conclusion

The central aim of this study was to explore senior male employees' views on glass ceiling as it relates to women in the banking sector. Based on insights from interviews with 43 senior male managers in four Nigerian banks, we uncovered how societal culture informs a performance-driven culture in banks, which makes career progression somewhat difficult for women because of a lack of adequate support, and how this performance-driven culture informs male employees' indifference to the prevalence of glass ceiling.

These findings highlight a disagreement in the conclusions reached on glass ceiling between male and female employees. While the senior male employees interviewed in our study argue that organisations are doing enough, existing studies conclude that senior female employees have reported the contrary (Williams et al., 2012) and call for urgent action to reduce – if not entirely eliminate – stereotypical behaviours against women. Male employees' rationalization of stereotype-based decisions against women (Adisa et al., 2021) means that the challenges influencing female employees' career progression may continue for the foreseeable future in Nigeria and other developing countries.

Manwa (2014) theorises that male and female employees' views differ regarding glass ceiling. Senior male employees expect their female colleagues to work hard and take advantage of family-friendly policies and performance-based promotions to gain promotion, regardless of the unfriendly organisational culture that is informed by the societal culture. Family-friendly policies in the form of maternity leave, time off work for check-ups, and family-support systems may not be helpful where an organisational culture supports long working hours and thus a high-performance culture (Manwa, 2014; Tijani-Adenle, 2019). Moreover, not all female employees can access family-support systems or employ the services of household help. Instead, more comprehensive family-friendly policies concerning childcare and support are required to address the issue of long working hours and thus glass ceiling (Gray, 2013).

This article thus contributes to the extant debate on this issue by providing unique insights into how men configure their views on the progression of women at work. We developed a framework highlighting how a low number of women in senior or managerial positions, family-friendly policies, and a consequent high-performance organisational culture (underpinned by

societal culture) informs senior male employees' rationalisations of glass ceiling problem. See Figure 1 below.

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Insert Figure 1 here

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By uncovering male employees' perspectives on glass ceiling, our study will help organisations seek ways to address this issue in male-dominated work environments, particularly in Nigeria and other countries in SSA with similar cultural and institutional environments. We encourage organisations to develop family-friendly policies to drive the promotion of female employees. Through their human-resources functions, organisations may introduce frameworks for managers to comply with affirmative action to support female employees' progression. Governments should not only introduce national gender policies but take active steps to encourage their implementation by providing incentives for organisations to leverage such policies.

Our study has some limitations. First, the data were collected from 43 employees, making it difficult for our findings to be generalised. However, data saturation was achieved during the interviews, and our findings provide an in-depth understanding of senior male employees' views on the career progression of female employees. Second, the data were collected only from a single sector in a single country. However, Nigerian culture is similar to many developing countries, so these findings may be applicable in other contexts. Third, the data were collected only from male senior employees. Male employees at other levels may have different views.

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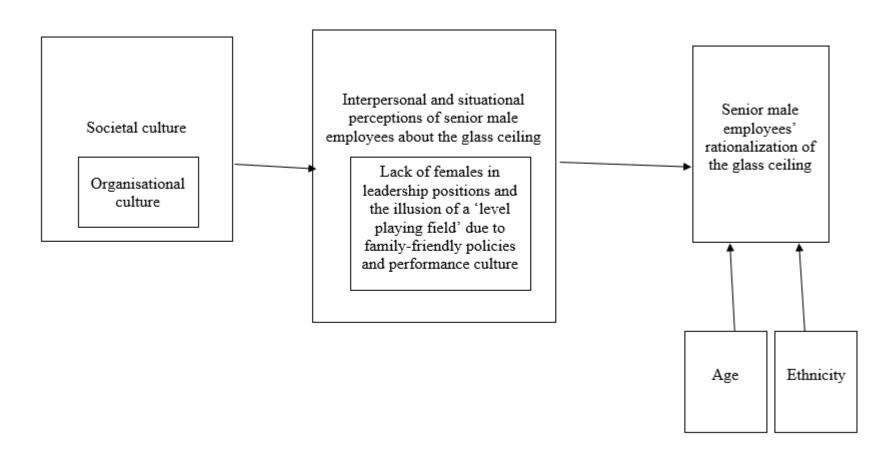
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Figure 1. Framework explaining senior male employees' rationalization of the glass ceiling in the Nigerian banking sector.