

## **Women in Accounting Academia: Another look**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The representation of women in the upper echelons within the accounting domain at universities in Zimbabwe is notably underrepresented, reflecting broader disparities observed across various academic disciplines and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Furthermore, the proportion of women with key roles in academe is similarly limited and still subjugated by men. This study delves into the persistent barriers women face throughout their accounting education journeys and proposes actionable strategies and practical recommendations to overcome these obstacles and enhance women's contributions to the field. Employing a phenomenographic research methodology, this study identifies and scrutinizes the intricate issues that impede women's perspectives and progress in the accounting field. The research reveals that patriarchal societal norms, gender bias, and the challenge of maintaining a work-life balance are the primary impediments to women's career advancement within the accounting sector. This study contributes to the literature on gender representation accounting academe, with a focus on the lived experiences of women in the academic setting, connecting the findings to prevalent gender bias, patriarchy, and the quest for work-life equilibrium. Academia advocates embracing a more inclusive approach to gender representation. This study is an inaugural empirical exploration of the career advancement challenges faced by women academics in Zimbabwe and the experiences of women at various career levels. This study deepens our understanding of the obstacles women encounter in their career progression within the accounting field, offers novel insights to bridge the gender gap in academic accounting and suggests practical measures for systemic reform.

**Keywords:** women, gendered, stratification, accounting, glass ceiling, academe

### **1. Introduction**

The literature seems conclusive in that accounting academia is a heart (or pivot) of gender discrimination, similar to other professions (Galizzi et al., 2024). In the contemporary world, a substantial body of literature on women and accounting has emerged mostly in the Global North (Zhao & Lord, 2016), focusing mainly on students and education (Lehman, 2012; Dambrin & Lambert, 2012), women in the accounting profession (Tiron-Tudor & Faragalla, 2019), students' perceptions of accounting, the performance of females in professional accounting courses (Taylor, 2013), women and financial literacy (Calaghan & Papageorgiou, 2015); however, the accounting academe literature in comparison considerably lacks gender analysis. Furthermore, the position of women in the academic space has received little attention if not ignored in research (Rico-Bonilla, 2020; Haynes, 2016; Carmona & Ezzamel, 2016), and research has been conducted in a narrow latitudinal and temporal framework, in which "although they constitute valuable

and detailed contributions, prevent having a comprehensive overview of women in the discipline..." (Bohorquez & Sanchez, 2021). However, research on gender issues in academes is scarce and underresearched (Lehman, 2019). Accounting academia has remained male-subjugated, promoting men to the upper echelons of institutions, with very few women in academia facing stereotypical transformation (Bohorquez & Sanchez, 2021; Lord & Robb, 2010), which is a gray area worthy of research. Institutions of higher learning, for instance, universities, have specific rules and regulations to which they subscribe, which are deemed to be masculine and portray less valued feminine attributes (Czarniawska, 2008; Grill et al., 2022). Thus, norms and practices of gender discrimination persist in varsities (Pruit, Rambo & Pruitt, 2024), as evidenced by very few women climbing the corporate ladder or occupying positions of influence and power (Vidwans & Cohen, 2020).

This study focuses on the Zimbabwean context for two reasons. First, there are few studies on women in academic accounting; hence, there is a need to combine the history of women in accounting, with the aim of enhancing scientific objectivity. The second reason is that Zimbabwe has enacted and applied legislation and regulations to promote gender equality, and Zimbabwe subscribes to the UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG), yet inequalities largely persevere; as such, this study aims to understand how the incursion of women in accounting academe is empowered and the extent to which obstacles to their advancement have been addressed. Research reveals that women make up a large portion of accounting graduates in Zimbabwe, yet women's participation in academic accounting is still low (Din et al., 2024). The literature shows that in most academic institutions, there are more male professors, deans and departmental chairpersons than women (Siboni et al., 2016). A possible reason for this disparity is "exclusion by performance or bias" (Siboni et al., 2016). Globally, the participation of women in academic accounting is increasing at an exponential rate, and the share of female academic staff is lower than that of male academics worldwide (Haynes, 2017). This is the first study to investigate women in accounting academia (in Zimbabwe) and to investigate the experiences of women at various career levels.

This is also the first study to employ a phenomenographic approach—a novel method that focuses on the reality given by those who had hands-on experience. It uses an interpretivist paradigm to explore the various ways the interviewees (or women) of the research experience or perceive the phenomenon (Marton, 1981). The paper proceeds as follows. After this introduction, section 2 reviews the literature. Section discusses the methodology and the method used. Section 4 presents the results and discussion. Section 5 concludes and proposes avenues for future research.

## **2. Literature review**

### **Feminist theories, women's access and challenges to the accounting academe.**

Several theories have been proposed to explain gender issues at workstations to help in understanding women and gender-related matters. Gender stratification and interpersonal behavior theories provide some explanation for this endemic inequality in the accounting field. Interpersonal theory assumes that females tend to overconsult, have low confidence, are aligned with the “rhythms of family life” (Vidwans & Cohen, 2020) and often make conservative decisions (Eitzen, Zinn & Smith, 2010). The theory further underscores that men, on the contrary, make radical and sometimes aggressive decisions and with confidence (Qasem & Abdullatif, 2014; Zubaidi, Al-Sammerai & Ahmad, 2011; Kumar, 210).

Gender stratification theory (or social stratification) refers to the imbalance between women and men in terms of opportunities, with men given first preference over women because of their gender (Collins, 1990). The theory focuses on social rankings, where men often inhibit a dominant higher status than women based on socially constructed criteria such as sex (male/female), class and race (Bryant, 2010). The theory suggests that social stratification exists to segment people or create a division of labour (Treas and Tai 2016). The theory underscores the existence of gender imbalance as an instrument for creating a social system. It emphasizes creating groups within the population or society from which one group will dominate the other. According to this theory, men are viewed as an important group, and women are viewed as a group that is often ignored and relegated (Keister and Southgate 2012). The underlying assumption is that men are more important than women are.

From a sociological point of view, women break through the glass ceiling and must conform to standards and norms as well as the expectations of being constructed to mirror a masculine image; thus, on many occasions, women often find it difficult to receive recognition in their career path (Lehman, 2019). The penetration of women into accounting academe calls for “a long period of intense efforts, protests and debates” (Tiron-Tudor & Faragalla, 2022). A possible explanation for this is that most managerial positions are male dominated, prohibiting female colleagues from joining them and negotiating salaries or working environments (Whiting & Wright, 2001).

The omission and undervaluing of the role of women in accounting academia and profession underscores the “masculine orientation as neutral” (Galizzi et al., 2024; Capelo-Bernal, Araujo-Pinzon & Funnell, 2018; IFAC, 2020). Historically (even before Christ and in Ancient Greece), women were subjected to a domestic model as the sole purpose of their lives (Burrel, 1987). In other words, they were subjected to a model of a separate sphere where they focused mainly on family needs and the desires of men (Evans & Rumens, 2020). Over time, some women broke “patriarchal yokes”, emancipated themselves and penetrated the male-dominated accounting society to accomplish financial freedom and rights (Zhao & Lord, 2016); Kimberger, Carter & Ross-Smith, 2010 labelled these as “strange”, “neurotic”, “unhappy”, “unnatural”, “nonsexual”,

“unladylike” and “unwanted” (Galizzi et al., 2024; Ferray & Deo, 2023). Haynes (2017) argued that the categorization of women was a separatist strategy aimed at excluding them from the discipline. Broadbent and Kirkham (2008) comment that the accounting society imposed intricate barriers and restrictions on women, preventing them from securing jobs in this gendered enterprise. The role of women in the accounting profession is still defined or associated with patriarchy, and it is an extension of the domestic model (household chores) (Anyidoho, Cafold & Medie, 2020; Anyidoho, 2018). Din, Chen and Nazneen (2018) argue that women’s occupation in accounting discipline is restricted to “menial and low-paid functions”, secretarial, clerical and bookkeeping positions—what is termed *the feminization* of roles (Galizzi et al., 2024). Thus, in academic space, women’s academic careers often remain horizontal/vertical segregations” (EU European Commu, 2008; Shen & Samkin, 2008). Studies have shown that 80% of world leaders are male, even though women have the same qualifications (Zhao & Lord, 2016). This indicates that women are still oppressed in their work environment (Broadbent, 2016).

Globally, in the 1970s and 1980s, the world witnessed a surge in the number of women with accounting degrees who were hired in the accounting field (Galizzi & Siboni, 2016). Despite the increase in women’s participation in the accounting field, they were discriminated against in terms of pay, promotion, responsibilities, training opportunities, contributions (or influences) and recognition in relation to their male colleagues (Qasem & Abdullatif, 2014; Hartman & Barber, 2020).

International literature findings, as well as recent surveys, suggest that the penetration of women in the profession is characterized by several barriers (Ebirim, et al., 2024). Such barriers are categorized into two broad categories: public and private barriers. Maheshwari and Nayak (2022) mention that educational qualifications, a lack of career advancement, limited prospects for progression, stereotypes and other invisible discriminatory practices and societal expectations undermine women’s participation in accounting academes. Blosser (2020), Stack and Malsch (2022), Gruber et al. (2021), Kossek et al. (2023) and Udom et al. (2022) revealed that women face numerous challenges when joining the accounting field, including limited promotion opportunities, gender bias, work-life balance, restricted mentorship opportunities, and salary disparities. Thus, the narrative that the participation of women in accounting roles is unconventional has evolved, creating a more conducive, inclusive and diverse accounting community (Sreevas et al., 2024; Langinier, Pundrich & AL-Ariss, 2024; Lapira, Marchetti & Thimas, 2020). As a result, the accounting fraternity witnessed a surge in women participating in various roles, despite this systemic hinderance (Agrizzi et al., 2021).

### **3. Methodology and method**

This research adopts a phenomenographic approach to delve into the way individuals perceive and comprehend their reality (Galizzi, McBride & Siboni, 2024). This

methodology posits that the prior experiences of individuals with a phenomenon influence their subsequent interactions with it. It primarily aims to investigate the unique perspectives through which individuals understand phenomena within their immediate environment, drawing upon their personal experiences (Marton, 1981).

From an ontological standpoint, this perspective suggests that reality cannot be objectively established but rather is socially constructed (Lupu, 2012). In other words, the reality that can be validated is the reality that individuals have experienced. Moreover, this ontological paradigm carries epistemological implications, as it acknowledges that individuals experience reality in subtly diverse ways. These diverse experiences can be described, communicated, and understood through a process of analysis. Consequently, this research method involves exploring the experiences of participants to identify the meanings they attribute to the phenomena of interest. These meanings are then categorized by the researcher based on their similarities and differences, thereby constituting the essential findings of this method.

The study utilizes an interpretive research paradigm, which places high value on human past experiences. Phenomenography illuminates how women shape their lives and, consequently, how the gendered nature of academic organizations and society influences the construction of their careers. This method examines the interconnections between women's career choices and the social and organizational structures that surround them. Furthermore, the "outcome space," a concept central to this research method, enables the identification of both the boundaries and relationships of the challenges faced by women in academia, thereby shedding light on the interconnections and emphasizing the individual's coping and change-seeking responses.

To ensure the validity, confirmability, and rigor of the study, the literature on phenomenography (Galizzi et al., 2024) recommends adhering to a precise process of analysis, with each phase meticulously explained. Therefore, a detailed account of the steps undertaken for this study is provided. To capture the experiences of individuals, phenomenography employs in-depth interviews. From a methodological perspective, the process of analysis involves identifying both the referential aspect (what) that points to the overall meaning assigned to the experience by the individual and the structural aspect (how) that reveals how the meaning of the phenomenon is understood at a deeper level of awareness, incorporating a range of features. In compliance with the foregoing, this study borrowed questions previously posed by Galizzi et al. (2024):

*"What kind of barriers have you encountered in your career, and when (recruitment, advancement, etc.)?"*

*"Why do you perceive these barriers as obstacles?"*

*"How did these barriers affect you?"*

Further probing questions, initiated by the expressions and words used by the participants, allowed the researchers to explore the concepts in depth. In total, 17 women from both private and public institutions of higher and tertiary education in Zimbabwe, who offered Bachelor of Accounting degrees, were involved. The sample for this study included one full professor, one associate professor, two senior lecturers, four PhD students, six individuals with master's degrees, and two ACCA professionals. It is imperative to mention that all interviews were conducted remotely via TEAMS platforms, with audio recordings made with verbal consent from participants, except for two who declined recording. Each interview session lasted for 25 minutes and was conducted exclusively in the English language. Following the interview sessions, the researchers transcribed the interviews verbatim to facilitate textual analysis. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants; however, to maintain confidentiality, the respondents' demographic details have been omitted.

**Table 1: Profile of Interviewees**

Academic position, highest qualification	Total number of women lecturers in accounting interviewed	Mode	Interview duration (minutes)	Pseudo
Full Professor, PhD	1	Virtual	30	FP1
Associate Professor, PhD	1	Virtual	32	AP1
Senior Lecturer, PhD	1	Virtual	38	SL1
Senior, Lecturer, Master's	1	Virtual	27	SL2
Lecturer, PhD student	1	Virtual	29	LP1
Lecturer, PhD student	1	Virtual	27	LP2
Lecturer, PhD student	1	Virtual	22	LP3
Lecturer, PhD student	1	Virtual	30	LP4
Lecturer, Master's	1	Virtual	31	LM1
Lecturer, Master's	1	Virtual	23	LM2
Lecturer, Master's	1	Virtual	20	LM3
Lecturer, Master's	1	Virtual	19	LM4
Lecturer, Master's	1	Virtual	26	LM5
Lecturer, Master's	1	Virtual	25	LM5
Lecturer, Master's	1	Virtual	29	LM6
Lecturer, ACCA	1	Virtual	23	LACC1
Lecturer, ACCA	1	Virtual	21	LACC2

**Source:** Authors (2024)

The qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews were analysed via thematic analysis. Thematic analysis focuses on analysing interviewees' subjective experiences

and processes of sense-making. According to Braun and Clarke (2016), (2017), and (2006), thematic analysis is utilized to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within the data. The researchers adopted a bottom-up approach, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which allows for the emergence of results or findings from key, frequent, or noteworthy themes within the data with greater flexibility. This inductive or bottom-up approach was employed to categorize the identified themes based on those outlined in the extant literature regarding gender and inclusivity.

Each interview was extensively reviewed and listened to multiple times by each of the two researchers, followed by a period of independent coding of relevant challenges identified within the transcripts into themes. This initial coding process was subsequently discussed and mutually agreed upon by the independent researchers to compare and share the challenges or hurdles identified. There was minimal variation in the coding process. Consequently, three overarching themes were identified to construct a framework for these themes: structural limitations and patriarchal norms in recruitment, criteria for the appointments and review of academic staff (CAPRAS) and recognition and professional progression. An initial description for each category, theme, and challenge was developed by the researchers to ensure a consistent approach. Through an analysis of 17 women's experiences, several multifaceted challenges to career progression were identified. Table 2 outlines the classifications and themes, drawing on the interviewees' experiences as illustrated through the transcripts.

#### **4. Results**

This section presents and discusses the findings from the interviews. The study identified several challenges affecting women's access to and progress in their careers from interviews of 17 women's experiences. The following are comments made in unstructured interviews in English. These interviews were generally undertaken under the assurance of confidentiality. Table 2 shows excerpts from the participants. This study analysed the intricate barriers faced by women in the academic accounting field at most universities in Zimbabwe, and the findings of the overarching themes from this qualitative study are discussed. The comments and excerpts from the interviewees are neatly presented in Table 2 and highlight various issues in each category of overarching themes. According to the interviews, women faced multiple challenges in their academic careers, and many failed to resist these challenges, resulting in quitting academia. Galizzi et al. (2024:12) highlighted that the academic environment is viewed by women as a place where "patriarchal culture is legitimized by the dominant patriarchal positions of males...there is gendered socialization with its prevalent stereotypes". The environment is characterized by "publish or perish", "work-life balance" and unequal opportunities, resulting in discrimination between promotion and progression.

##### *Structural Limitation and Patriarchal Norms in Recruitment*

Most participants identified structural limitations and patriarchal norms in academic society. The findings of this study underscore that inequalities still prevail in accounting academes regardless of legislative reforms, time and institutional revolutions. This is in line with the findings of Lupu (2012), who concludes that the recruitment process is transparent; however, inequality exists in regard to promotion and recognition. From these comments (Table 2), it can be inferred that universities in Zimbabwe prefer to hire men because they believe that women are not aggressive, are too emotional and lack self-esteem.

**Table 2: Excerpts from the interviewees' statements**

Overarching theme(s)	subthemes	Excerpts from the participants statements
Structural limitation and Patriarchal Norms in recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gendered expectation in career requirements</li> <li>- Stereotypes and prejudices</li> <li>- Networking opportunities</li> <li>- Qualification expectations</li> <li>- Stereotypes,</li> <li>- Roles and conceptions of patriarchal societies.</li> </ul>	<p><i>"The new policy is very restrictive, the entry requirement into academic is a master's degree in accounting." (LM1)</i></p> <p><i>"I day I heard, my dean passing out a comment, oooh this complain is from that department head by Miss XXX (name withheld), this thinking indicate that women can not contribute meaningfully to the academia." (LACC2)</i></p> <p><i>"They prefer recruiting men, whom they think they have energy and less disturbances in regard to conferencing, workshops and other assignment." (LM3)</i></p> <p><i>"I remember during Prof J Moyo's time as a Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, alignment was key, that is they need BCom in Accounting along with a Master's degree in Accounting, not MBA.." (AP1)</i></p> <p><i>"The education rarely values us; they believe that we are not assertiveness in leadership roles." (FP1)</i></p> <p><i>"The recruitment bar is very high; I think the expectation from women candidates must reasonable. We are discriminated." LM5)</i></p> <p><i>"It is difficulty for women to collaborate with other male counterparts..." (SL2)</i></p> <p><i>"There are very limited opportunities for accessing networks and mentorship that promote entry into academic careers for women." (LM3)</i></p>
Criteria for the Appointment and Review of Academic Staff (CAPRAS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Glass ceiling</li> <li>- Mentorship Sponsorship</li> <li>- Work-life-balance issues</li> </ul> &	<p><i>"Out of more than 17 public and private universities offering accounting degree in Zimbabwe, there is only 1 Chairperson and 1 Dean the bulky of women are at junior department levels" (SL3)</i></p> <p><i>"I had to appeals because I have all the good publications over 30 or so in top rated Scopus indexed journal, the system</i></p>

		<p><i>wanted to suppress me, because I am a woman...thank God I got my promotion as a senior lecturer." (AP1)</i></p> <p><i>"The system is creating what I can call a bottlenecking system: they want it to sound a male dominated career path; the assessment criteria for one to be a senior lecturer, associate Professor, and Full Professor, are far beyond reach."</i></p> <p><i>"Academic Staff, Grading Tenure &amp; Promotions is discriminatory because they need more than 40 publications plus a patent in your name for full professor promotion...now us women we have children to attend to." (LP4)</i></p> <p><i>"To balance work and wifely duties, maternity and children along other gender roles is difficult hence most women are at the periphery in regard to promotion and networking" (SL2)</i></p> <p><i>"Quitting the gender-based roles and concentrate on the career demands is difficult, most women who have made it through the academic life are having their husbands in the academic fraternity, or they single mothers, divorced or widows." (LM5).</i></p> <p><i>"I am still trying to reconcile work and house chores and it's not doable. I normally sleep 3 hours daily trying to balance the two." (LM1)</i></p> <p><i>"Recently, I applied for as senior lecturer position; I am told that I don't qualify because I have never attended international conference or present a research paper...this is total madness... I nearly quit this career." (LP4)</i></p>
Recognition & Professional progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Credit recognition contributions</li> <li>- Continuous Professional Development opportunities</li> </ul>	<p>and for</p> <p><i>"The first time I met my PhD supervisor here in Zimbabwe, my supervisor told me that was going to spend 7 years doing PhD. Indeed, I am now in my 6<sup>th</sup> year. They want to make sure that they frustrate us and remain a few" (LP3)</i></p> <p><i>"The promotions committee comprises of only men which means women may not have a voice for themselves". (LM2)</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community engagement, publishing research &amp;</li> <li>- Public obstacles in the accounting profession</li> </ul>	<p><i>“In Zimbabwe, we are only two female Professors and not even a single man in accounting, we are slowly coming but its not easy.” (AP1)</i></p> <p><i>“Doing a PhD in Zimbabwe is a sacrifice- it appears that the supervisors want to punish us. Now good opportunities are in South Africa. The problem emanates from Family and study leave approval. Leaving family for a 3-year study in South Africa is not easy, the paperwork is a mammoth task. Going there you risk losing husband to others...” (LM5).</i></p> <p><i>“The publication in the peer-reviewed journal, time to gather data is another barrier to female participation in research and publication.” (LACC2)</i></p> <p><i>“For you to be recognized you must have done community engagement, service to the university, and publication. Reconciling these three plus the teaching load and family is often very difficult.” AP1)</i></p> <p><i>“Caregiving responsibilities and family obligations affect our productivity in key pillars of the university.” (FP1)</i></p> <p><i>“The criteria for assessing academic achievements and contributions are bias and align closely with convectional male roles or research areas.” (LM6).</i></p> <p><i>“Generally, the way the criteria are designed or structured does not provide opportunities tailored to women’s unique characteristics.” (LACC1)</i></p> <p><i>“You want promotion, but you are not including my name...” (AP1)</i></p>
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*Criteria for the Appointment and Review of Academic Staff (CAPRAS)*

The interviewees revealed that the requirements for the promotion of academic staff are discriminatory, especially for women, who have other extra roles after work. The authors indicated that ZIMCHE sets standards that are far from those for females (Table 3).

**Table 3: Summary of Criteria for the Appointment and Review of Academic Staff (CAPRAS)**

Grade	Description	Education 5.0 Pillars/Missions	Minimum Score for promotion	Qualifications, Grading and Tenure on Initial Appointment
3a	Professor	Teaching	25	Earned PhD/DPhil/DTech/Dsc/DB Honours first class degree and MTech/MSc/MPhil May be tenured on appointment. Minimum of 40 publications in accredited refereed journals or equivalent IP rights
		Research	40	
		Innovation	30	
		Industrialization	25	
		Community service	15	
		<b>Professor Total points</b>	<b>135</b>	
4a	Associate Professor	Teaching	25	Earned PhD/DPhil/DTech/Dsc/DB Honours first class degree and MTech/MSc/MPhil May be tenured on appointment. Minimum of 25 publications in accredited refereed journals or equivalent IP rights
		Research	25	
		Innovation	20	
		Industrialization	20	
		Community service	12	
		<b>Associate Professor Total Points</b>	<b>107</b>	
5a	Senior Lecturer	Teaching	20	Earned PhD/DPhil/DTech/Dsc/DB Honours first class degree and MTech/MSc/MPhil May be tenured on appointment. Minimum of 12 publications in accredited refereed journals or equivalent IP rights
		Research	12	
		Innovation	15	
		Industrialization	12	
		Community service	15	

		<b>Senior Lecturer Total Points</b>	<b>80</b>	
6a	Lecturer	Entry points (starts working on fulfilling Education 3.0)	Entry points	Normally an Honours First Degree and MTech/MSc/MPhil/Masters aligned to First Degree. May be tenured after three years subject to minimum of 5 publications in accredited refereed journals (or Accessed equivalents)
7a	Teaching Assistant	N/A	N/A	Honours First Degree. Annual appointment for a maximum period of three years during which one is expected to acquire a recognized Masters degree

**Source:** ZIMCHE (2023)

The participants felt that the promotion standard was too restrictive to favour men. The women interviewed felt that the masculine group set restrictive standards to ensure that women remain as lecturers, module leaders or programme leaders. Interesting from these results, Zimbabwe has only two associate professors in accounting—all of whom are female. This means that despite all the masculinity standards, women were able to break the glass ceiling. The findings above contrast with those of Ezzamel (2016), who indicated that women fail to occupy senior positions because they uphold unsuitable standards and are unqualified. The findings also oppose the assumption of gender stratification theory (Acker, 1992; 2012), which assumes that top echelon posts are reserved for men. Joseph and Dhanabhakyan (2022) suggested that until gender issues are challenged, women will continue to be underrepresented in key accounting roles in the academe. Thus, women must shatter these racial and gender obstacles and improve their participation in the accounting domain. According to the interviewees' comments above (Table 2), the ZIMCHE promotion guidelines are transparent but are prohibitive for most women and not fair for married women, as such women are discriminated against.

#### *Recognition & Professional progression*

Several interviewees highlighted the challenges they experienced in accounting academes. They indicated that outstanding awards, for instance, on publications, research and industrialization, are always given to men. The criterion for who qualifies for men is politically constructed to favour men. The participants were bemoaned about lack

of transparency in recognition and study application approval. Based on the findings of this study, women are excluded from scholarships and other manpower development programs. This entails that it takes a longer period of serious protests, advocacy and hardworking for women to break gender-related barriers. The findings above are supported by Tiron-Tudor and Faragalla (2022), who reported that reward and recognition are not pro-men and shatter opportunities for females to rise through the ranks. These results reconfirm the existence of gender imbalance and discrimination and the belief that women in academes do not meet the criteria for promotion and recognition (Adapa & Sheridan, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

Women's progress in accounting academe is still subjected to some form of discrimination and oppression. In the present study, the majority of the participants indicated that the accounting academe was still gendering and gendered (Haynes, 2017). This study identifies some barriers that contribute to the scarcity of Zimbabwean women occupying senior positions and other influential positions in academia. The study results complement, extend and support previous research studies on women in accounting academe, but in Zimbabwe, impediments are more prevalent and common in state universities because of patriarchal ideology and historical beliefs. In-depth interviews with women in the accounting department reveal deep and entrenched evidence of jealous, racial and gender discrimination against women. The dominance of masculinity leads to the suppression of women in accounting academes.

Furthermore, the study found evidence that high qualifications and the required number of Scopus-indexed articles do not automatically result in promotion, but women must also demonstrate their active involvement in university service, service to the profession, and community services and must be strategic, providing evidence of their work to the promotion committee. Additionally, some women mentioned that deans and heads or chairs recommend an application for promotion from women on the condition that the applicant has included the name of the supervisor in one of the published articles. These issues have not been revealed or mentioned in previous studies and, as mentioned above, may be associated with the cultural norms of Zimbabwe.

This study has several practical implications, especially for policymakers. This study calls for labor and employment law reforms that promote inclusivity and gender balance and criminalize subjectivity, gender discrimination and racial stigma (Grayer, 2024). There must be sections in the Employment Act that criminalize questions such as the following: Are you married? So how are you going to balance your family and work? Do you have children? How do you carry out the task considering that you are pregnant? The government must heavily punish any organization that discriminates against women. This would allow fairness in recruiting and promotion opportunities. In Zimbabwe, pregnant

women are given maternity leave for 90 days and remain on payroll; however, laws that focus on gender balance and the creation of equal opportunities for men and women should be enacted and enforced (Zhao & Lord, 2016). Furthermore, the study contributes to both the Global South and Zimbabwean extant literature on women in accounting societies (or careers). They confirm some previous results, contribute to the understanding of certain issues, specifically the Zimbabwean context, and broaden the focus from accounting academe to women in corporations.

The study gathered data from 17 participants drawn purposively from universities in Zimbabwe. Future studies could extend the study to 50 participants or more to make the results more generalizable and valid. Furthermore, future researchers can use mixed methods to collect data to ensure that the findings are more realistic, dependable and tested.

### **Author contribution statement**

E.M. was the primary researcher and author and contributed to the study conception, study design, execution, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation, and D.S. drafted or wrote, substantially revised or critically reviewed the article.

### **Conflict of interest statement**

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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### **Data availability statements**

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request from the corresponding author, E.M. The data are not publicly available due to restrictions, including information that could compromise the privacy of the research participants.

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