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LEAP OF FAITH: SUPPORT SYSTEMS GHANAIAN FEMALE PROFESSORS' ASCRIBED TO
THEIR SUCCESS WHILE NAVIGATING MALE DOMINATED STEM DOCTORAL PROGRAMS.

Abstract

The low involvement of girls and women in STEM fields can be noticed at all levels of education, with an inclination for female participation to diminish as the level of education rises (UNESCO, 2016). This is reflected in the labor market where their participation further diminishes all through their career path, and women are generally missing in higher level managerial and decision-making positions (UNESCO, 2016). This is a phenomenological qualitative study which sought to examine the support systems Ghanaian female STEM professors ascribed to the success while seeking after their doctorate. The participants for the study were 11 Ghanaian female lectures and professors in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. These faculty members were educated in Africa, Europe, and North America.

Studies have shown the low enrollment of women in STEM doctoral programs (UNESCO, 2016). This study discusses the lack of support systems female STEM professors ascribe to the decrees in STEM doctoral programs. According to Margolis and Fisher's (2002) study, women do not get the needed support to pursue science and quantitative courses that may provoke their enthusiasm for male-dominated fields such as computer science and engineering, consequently they enter low-paying areas. "Society is changing, and both men and women need to wake up to the realities that modernization brings and adjust their way of life to create space for women and provide both traditional and modernized support systems to enable them to enhance themselves professionally" (p. 75). Kwapong (2007) suggests the provision of support systems for women. Choudaha's (2016) study advised that international students need, deserve, and want more in terms of academic and career support.

The research question guiding this study is: What support systems did Ghanaian female lecturers/professors ascribe to their success while seeking after their doctorate? The Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems and Postcolonial feminist theory were employed in my study to provide a platform for the oppressed voices to be heard and to portray the effects and what is entailed in the ecological system and how it affects the human being. This is a qualitative research. Data was collected utilizing phenomenological interviewing, documents, and researcher's journal. Utilizing Seidman (2006) structure of phenomenological interviewing approach afforded me the opportunity to collect rich data that served as a detailed foundation for the findings and conclusions (Soesbe, 2012). Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological data analysis method was used to analyze data solicited.