

# Altitudes and Attitudes: Women's Roles and Challenges in the Global Aviation Industry

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## ABSTRACT:

This study explored the experiences and challenges faced by women in the aviation industry, aiming to shed light on gender dynamics and identify opportunities for promoting greater inclusivity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five female informants working in various aspects of the aviation sector. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, revealing both positive experiences of inclusivity and ongoing challenges related to gender stereotypes, workplace biases, and work-life balance. The study highlighted the importance of mentorship and role models in supporting women's advancement, while also emphasizing the need for comprehensive diversity policies, leadership development programs, and inclusive workplace cultures. Recommendations were provided for industry leaders, women aviators, female students, and future researchers to address these challenges and foster a more equitable and supportive environment for women in aviation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The aviation industry, a symbol of modern technological advancement and global connectivity, remains an arena where gender disparities are starkly visible, particularly among women aviators. Despite significant progress in many sectors toward gender equality, the world of aviation continues to be dominated by men, especially in high-status roles such as pilots, engineers, and executives (Yanikoğlu, Kılıç, & Küçükönel, 2020). This thesis, titled "Altitude and Attitudes: Women's Role and Challenges in the Global Aviation Industry," seeks to explore and analyze the persistent gender imbalances within this critical field.

Historically, the aviation industry has been shaped by cultural and institutional biases that have favored men, resulting in a significant underrepresentation of women in various capacities. While women constitute nearly half of the global workforce, their presence in the aviation sector is disproportionately low. For example, as of 2023, women make up less than 6% of commercial pilots worldwide and hold an even smaller percentage of senior management positions (CAPA, 2023). This gender disparity is not only a matter of social justice but also represents a missed opportunity for the industry to benefit from diverse perspectives and talents.

The barriers to entry and advancement for women in aviation are multifaceted. Societal stereotypes and gender norms often dissuade young girls from pursuing careers in fields perceived as masculine, such as piloting and aerospace engineering. Additionally, the aviation industry's demanding schedules, extensive

travel, and historically male- dominated culture can create an unwelcoming environment for women. Structural challenges, such as limited mentorship opportunities and inadequate support for work-life balance, further exacerbate these issues. By shedding light on the systemic challenges and exploring pathways for improvement, this thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on gender equality in aviation. Ultimately, achieving a more inclusive and equitable aviation industry will not only benefit women but also enhance the overall performance and innovation capacity of the sector.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

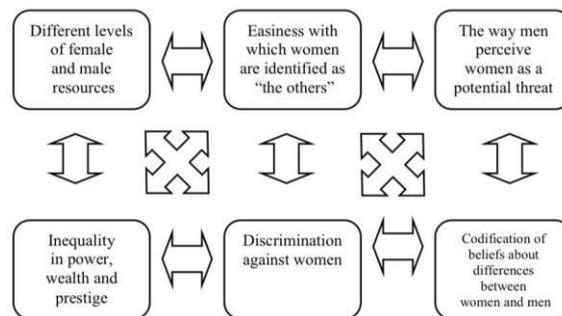
The aviation industry, a symbol of technological progress and global integration, has long facilitated the rapid movement of people and goods across vast distances. However, despite its role in connecting the world, the aviation sector has struggled to achieve gender parity, particularly in high-status roles such as pilots, engineers, and executives (FlightGlobal, 2022). While women are increasingly entering the aviation workforce, they remain underrepresented in leadership positions, highlighting the persistent challenges they face in navigating a historically male- dominated field.

Structural barriers contribute significantly to this gender disparity. Women in aviation often encounter a lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, which are crucial for career progression (Yanikoğlu, Kılıç, & Küçükönal, 2020). Inadequate support for work- life balance, including inflexible work schedules and insufficient maternity leave policies, further hampers women's career advancement. While initiatives aimed at increasing female representation and fostering inclusive workplace cultures have been implemented, the effectiveness of these efforts varies, and significant work remains to be done to achieve true gender parity in aviation.

This thesis aims to explore and analyze the gender dynamics within the global aviation industry, focusing on the representation, challenges, and experiences of women. By examining qualitative data, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to gender disparities and to evaluate the impact of current policies and initiatives. Ultimately, the goal is to identify strategies that can foster a more inclusive and equitable aviation industry, benefiting from the diverse perspectives and talents of both men and women.

### 1.2. Theoretical Framework

**Figure 1 Conflict Theory by Turner and Musick**



This theoretical framework draws upon the insights of Turner and Musick (1985) to analyze the persistent gender disparities in the aviation industry. Their work highlights how historical and cultural factors have contributed to the unequal distribution of power, wealth, and prestige between men and women across societies.

Turner and Musick argue that the division of social roles into male and female categories, often reinforced by cultural beliefs, has historically led to discrimination against women. This discrimination is rooted in the unequal power dynamics that emerged during the age of hunting and gathering, where

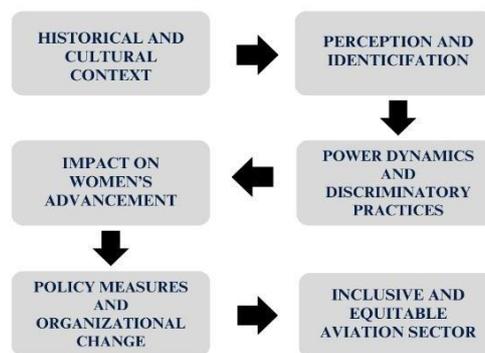
men disproportionately gained power, wealth, and prestige, a pattern that continues to manifest in contemporary societies. They further note that competition in the labor market can exacerbate discrimination, as women often accept lower salaries than their male counterparts.

Applying this framework to the aviation industry, it becomes evident how these unequal power dynamics and discriminatory practices limit women's opportunities for leadership, equal pay, and career progress. Cultural attitudes and biases impact women's integration and advancement in roles traditionally dominated by men, thus perpetuating gender disparities in the industry. The term "attitude" serves as a metaphor for positions of power and influence, highlighting the need to address the underlying cultural and societal factors that contribute to the exclusion of women.

Effective policy measures and organizational changes are crucial to mitigate these challenges and foster a more inclusive and equitable aviation sector. By challenging discriminatory practices, promoting equal opportunities, and fostering a culture of inclusivity, the industry can create an environment where women can thrive and contribute fully to its development.

### 1.3. Conceptual Framework

**Figure 2 Understanding Women’s Role and Challenges**



This study employs a multi-faceted conceptual framework to examine the gender dynamics within the global aviation industry, focusing on the representation, challenges, and experiences of women. The framework integrates historical, cultural, and organizational perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to gender disparities and to evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and initiatives.

### 1.4. Statement of the Problem

The aviation industry, despite its role in global connectivity and technological advancement, continues to grapple with significant gender disparities, particularly affecting women’s representations and career progression.

This study aims to investigate the persistent gender gaps in the aviation industry, focusing on the following research questions:

1. What strategies can be implemented to evaluate advancements toward gender equality in the aviation industry?
2. What are the contributing factors to the underrepresentation and challenges faced by women in the aviation industry?
3. How do attitudes and perceptions toward women affect their decisions to pursue aviation-related careers?

### 1.5. Hypothesis

The global aviation industry presents significant challenges for women, who face barriers to entry and advancement due to a confluence of societal biases, organizational cultures, and field-specific norms.

### 1.6. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study extends to a diverse range of beneficiaries, each poised to gain valuable insights and benefits from the research findings.

The primary beneficiaries of this study include:

**Aviation Industry Leaders.** The study's findings will equip aviation industry leaders with valuable insights into the specific barriers and opportunities for women in aviation. This knowledge will empower them to implement more effective diversity practices, foster a more inclusive work environment, and ultimately improve organizational culture and performance.

**Women Aviators.** This study will empower women aviators by validating their experiences, highlighting their resilience, and showcasing their contributions to the aviation industry. This recognition will encourage more women to pursue and persist in aviation careers, fostering a more diverse and representative workforce.

**Female Aviation Students.** The study will serve as a valuable resource for women considering careers in aviation, offering insights into the industry's gender dynamics and showcasing successful women who have navigated similar challenges. This information will empower them to make informed decisions about their future career paths and provide them with the support and guidance needed to succeed in the aviation field.

**Future Researchers.** This study will serve as a foundation for future research on gender disparities in the aviation industry, providing a comprehensive overview of the existing literature and identifying areas for further investigation. By building upon the findings of this study, future researchers can explore these issues in greater depth, addressing gaps in the current knowledge base and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in aviation.

**General Public.** This study will indirectly aid the general public by contributing to a broader understanding of gender equality issues and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society. By highlighting the challenges faced by women in the aviation industry, this research will raise awareness of these issues and encourage greater support for initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in all sectors.

### 1.7. Review of Related Literature

The underrepresentation of women in the aviation industry, particularly in leadership roles, is a persistent issue that has garnered increasing attention in recent years (FlightGlobal, 2022; Amaugo, 2022). This review of related literature highlights the multifaceted challenges women face in this historically male-dominated field, encompassing societal biases, organizational cultures, and specific barriers within the aviation training process.

Research across various sectors, including skilled crafts (Walshok, 1981; Gerson, 1982), maritime industries (Bhirugnath- Bhookhun & Kitada, 2017), and aviation (Germain et al., 2012; Thida et al., 2023; Andreis, 2023), consistently demonstrates the impact of societal biases and organizational structures on women's career progression. These studies reveal that women often face a lack of acceptance, limited mentorship opportunities, and difficulties in accessing professional networks, all of which hinder their advancement. For instance, Walshok (1981) found that women in skilled crafts, such as carpentry and electrical work, experience high turnover rates due to the obstacles they face in achieving work tenure in these traditionally male-dominated fields. Similarly, Bhirugnath- Bhookhun and Kitada (2017) observed that women in the maritime industry often prioritize work over a balanced life, facing pressure to handle domestic duties alongside professional responsibilities.

Furthermore, the aviation industry's demanding schedules, extensive travel, and historically male-dominated culture can create an unwelcoming environment for women (Germain et al., 2012). This is compounded by the high cost of training and the tendency of airlines to shift financial obligations to students, further discouraging women from pursuing piloting careers (Marintseva et al., 2022). Germain et al. (2012) identified several barriers that women encounter during aviation training, including a lack of acceptance, self-efficacy, and social support from organizations, flight instructors, and family. These obstacles often lead women to abandon their aviation training altogether.

The lack of role models and mentorship for women in aviation is a recurring theme in the literature (Thida et al., 2023; Marintseva et al., 2022; Durbin, 2016). This lack of guidance and support contributes to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and perpetuates the cycle of gender inequality. Thida et al. (2023) found that women in the aviation industry face challenges such as limited mentorship support, gender discrimination, and difficulties in pursuing overseas job opportunities. Marintseva et al. (2022) echoed these findings, highlighting the impact of cultural sexism, lack of role models, and non-acceptance by male peers and passengers on women's career choices.

While initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in aviation have been implemented, their effectiveness is debatable (Marintseva et al., 2022). The number of women in aviation professions, particularly as pilots, has not significantly increased, highlighting the need for more robust and targeted interventions (Marete & Wang, 2024). Despite the increasing number of women involved in aviation, Marete and Wang (2024) found that the number and percentage of female airline transport pilots (ATPs) have not significantly changed from 2007 to 2021, indicating a need for more effective strategies to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in this field.

The synthesis of the review of related literature and studies reveals a pressing need for a holistic strategy to tackle gender disparities within the aviation industry. The literature highlights the pervasive influence of societal biases, organizational cultures, and specific barriers that hinder women's advancement in aviation careers. Women face challenges ranging from a lack of acceptance and limited mentorship opportunities to gender discrimination and cultural stereotypes. These obstacles not only impede their career progression but also contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles.

While there have been efforts to address these issues through initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and diversity, the literature suggests that there are persistent gaps in effectively supporting women in the aviation sector. The existing research underscores the importance of creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in aviation, where they can thrive and contribute fully. Key areas for improvement include challenging societal biases, fostering inclusive organizational cultures that value diversity, providing ongoing support for women throughout their careers, and implementing mentorship programs tailored to their needs.

Despite some progress in acknowledging and addressing gender disparities in aviation, the literature indicates that more targeted and comprehensive interventions are needed to create lasting change. The gaps identified in the literature point to the necessity of developing strategies that not only address the existing barriers faced by women in aviation but also empower them to overcome these challenges and achieve equal opportunities for career advancement. By bridging these gaps and implementing effective solutions, the aviation industry can pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive future for women in aviation.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the roles and challenges of women in the global aviation industry, providing in-depth insights into their experiences, perceptions, and the barriers they face. Interpretive phenomenology served as the methodological framework, focusing on understanding how women make sense of their lived experiences within the aviation industry. This approach allowed for a rich and nuanced exploration of the complexities of gender dynamics within the sector. The data discussed in the literature review provided a foundational context for the research and informed the development of the research questions and data collection methods.

### 2.2. Participant

The target participants for this study were women who are aviation professionals with experience in the industry. The study aimed to gather data from five participants. By exploring the experiences and viewpoints of these women, the study sought to offer practical insights that could improve gender diversity and inclusivity in the aviation industry.

### 2.3. Setting

This research study was conducted at PATTS College of Aeronautics in the City of Parañaque. The study focused on examining the roles and challenges faced by women in the global aviation industry. Data was collected through interviews conducted via video communication platforms. This approach allowed for the gathering of relevant information and provided insights into the specific issues faced by women in this field, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of gender dynamics in aviation.

### 2.4. Instrumentation

This study employed snowball sampling to identify and recruit participants for in-depth interviews. The researchers utilized Google Meet and Zoom for data collection, aiming to explore and analyze the roles, contributions, and challenges faced by women in the global aviation industry. Through these interviews, the study sought to identify the barriers hindering women's participation and advancement in aviation. The findings were expected to underscore the necessity for aviation companies and regulators to implement targeted initiatives to encourage greater female participation in the aviation sector.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews underwent a rigorous thematic analysis to uncover the core experiences and challenges faced by women in the aviation industry. Each interview was recorded, transcribed accurately, and annotated to extract the necessary data for the study. This meticulous process ensured a comprehensive examination of the themes and insights derived from the participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### 2.6. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical considerations throughout the research process. Participants were informed of the study's objectives and procedures and obtained their informed consent before data collection. Participants were free to decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All data collected was treated with the utmost confidentiality, and participants' identities were anonymized to ensure privacy. The researchers maintained the integrity of the research by accurately and faithfully representing the study's objectives and findings, avoiding any misrepresentation or exaggeration. This approach ensured ethical research practices and protected the rights and well-being of the participants.

### III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Results

**Table 1 Women’s Positive Industry Experiences**

Emergent Theme	Thematic Cluster	Interview Extract
Positive Experience and Inclusivity	Positive experience	“My experience is good. So far, I have not experienced gender stereotypes.”
		“My experience has been very positive. There is not much discrimination anymore.”
	Significant number of women in leadership	“I am seeing more and more women in leadership roles, which is very encouraging.”
	Inclusive industry	“The industry is becoming more inclusive, and it’s inspiring to see women excelling and driving innovation.”
		“Working in this industry has been a wonderful experience, and I feel respected by my peers.”

Table 1 summarizes the positive experiences and perceptions of inclusivity reported by women in the aviation industry. Statements from respondents highlighted the industry's progress in becoming more welcoming and respectful, with an increasing number of women assuming leadership roles.

**Table 2 Overcoming Gender-Related Challenges**

Emergent Theme	Thematic Cluster	Interview Extract
Challenges Faced by Women	Gender stereotypes	“I think there are preconceived notions about me being a woman and my abilities compared to my male peers.”
		“There are still some old-school attitudes that need to change.”
	Workplace biases	“The salaries of men are higher

		than those of women.”
	Cultural differences	“Cultural differences around the world influence the participation of women in aviation.”
	Personal challenges	“Balancing work and family life is still a major challenge for many women in this field.”

Table 2 outlines various challenges faced by women in the aviation industry. These challenges included gender stereotypes, workplace biases, cultural differences, and personal hurdles that impacted career progression and work-life balance. These findings align with the study by Thida et al. (2023), which highlighted the multifaceted deterrents women experience in aviation, creating a social network that is harder for women to navigate.

Table 3 focuses on the impact of societal attitudes and institutional barriers on women's participation and advancement in the aviation industry. The table highlights the ongoing influences of gender stereotypes, limited educational opportunities, and workplace biases that continue to hinder women's progress in this field.

**Table 3 Societal and Institutional Impact**

Emergent Theme	Thematic Cluster	Interview Extract
Impact of Societal Attitudes and Institutional Barriers	Societal attitudes	“I can say it is not a place that is very welcoming to women.”
	Institutional barriers	“Workplace biases in hiring and promotion, and challenges balancing work-life responsibilities.” “One of the things I had a hard time with was with the work environment. I can say it is not a place that is very welcoming to women.”
	Gender stereotypes	“Gender stereotypes, limited educational opportunities, workplace biases, and challenges in balancing work-life responsibilities have all influenced women's participation in this field.”

	Educational opportunities	“Things like being assigned less physical jobs which for others might be an advantage but for me, I see it as a learning opportunity that I’m missing out.”
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**Table 4 Influence of Mentorship and Role Models**

Emergent Theme	Thematic Cluster	Interview Extract
Mentorship and role models	Mentorship	“Yes, a lot of female professors and empowering female organizations.”  “Mentorship programs have been incredibly helpful in my career.”
	Role models	“I don't have a mentor but I do have a role model.”  “Seeing successful women in leadership positions motivates me to keep pushing forward.”
Guidance and inspiration		“I have this one professor in college who would guide us regardless of how many mistakes I have made.”

Table 4 underscores the importance of mentorship and role models for women in the aviation industry. Respondents emphasized how mentorship and having role models can provide guidance, support, and inspiration. These findings are consistent with the study by Marintseva et al. (2022), which highlighted the crucial role of role models, mentors, and personal support in encouraging women to pursue aviation careers. The study also emphasized the need for career planning support to address the financial and logistical challenges associated with aviation training.

**Table 5 Advancements in Gender Equality**

Emergent Theme	Thematic Cluster	Interview Extract
Progress toward gender equality	Gender equality	“The industry is making progress towards gender equality.”
		“There are more opportunities for women now than ever before.”
	Increased representation	“It’s encouraging to see more women being promoted to higher positions.”
		“Improvements include increased representation of women in

		traditionally male
		dominated roles.”

Table 5 presents participants' views on the progress being made toward gender equality in the aviation industry. Statements regarding increased representation of women and policy changes promoting equality were included. While progress in representation has been observed, challenges remain in engaging and retaining women in leadership positions. This finding aligns with Amaugo's (2022) observation that the lack of visible female role models in leadership positions can hinder women's aspirations and motivation to pursue aviation-related careers.

Table 6 discusses various initiatives and policies that can encourage more women to join and succeed in the aviation industry. These include protective policies, targeted training programs, collaborative efforts, and equal pay initiatives. This finding aligns with the study by Dinçer and Yirmibeşoğlu (2024), which highlighted the significant impact of globalization on the airline industry and international trade. Through collaboration across disciplines and fields, women can access broader institutional and occupational opportunities that were previously limited to men.

**Table 6 Encouragement Through Initiatives and Policies**

Emergent Theme	Thematic Cluster	Interview Extract
Initiatives and policies to encourage women	Protective policies	“Policy changes are slowly but surely making a difference.”
		“Policies that protect women from being harassed encourage them more to pursue an aviation career.”
	Training programs	“Implement training programs to raise awareness about gender bias.”
	Collaboration	“I think aviation companies should do collaborative programs with other aviation companies and educational institutions.”
	Compensated salary	“Equal pay initiatives are crucial to retain talented women in the industry.”
		“More efforts are needed to create a supportive environment for women.”

## IV. DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Conclusions

The study's analysis revealed both progress and ongoing challenges related to gender dynamics within the aviation industry. While positive signs of increased inclusivity and representation of women in leadership roles were observed, issues such as gender stereotypes, workplace biases, and work-life balance difficulties persisted. The thematic analysis highlighted positive experiences of inclusivity and increased representation of women in leadership opportunities, yet participants still faced preconceived gender notions, salary disparities, cultural differences, and personal hurdles.

The study indicated that gender stereotypes and prejudiced recruitment and promotion procedures are significant barriers to women's participation in aviation. Mentorship and role models were identified as critical in providing support and encouragement to women in overcoming these obstacles. Although progress has been made in gender equality, further efforts are needed to develop protective policies, implement awareness campaigns, and ensure equal pay measures. Continuous efforts to address these challenges and build upon previous successes are crucial. By fostering a more inclusive environment, the aviation industry can benefit from the full involvement and growth of women, ultimately enhancing its overall performance and culture.

### 4.2. Recommendations

Based on the study's conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

#### 1. Aviation Industry Leaders

**Implement Diversity Policies.** Develop and enforce robust diversity and inclusion policies to reduce workplace biases and promote gender equality in hiring, promotions, and compensation.

**Leadership Development.** Create dedicated leadership development programs for women to equip them for higher-level positions within the industry.

**Inclusive Work Environment.** Foster a workplace culture that promotes work-life balance, actively combats gender stereotypes, and offers equitable opportunities for professional development.

#### 2. Women Aviators

**Mentorship Programs.** Expand mentorship programs that connect aspiring and current female aviators with experienced female professionals to provide guidance, support, and career advice.

**Support Networks.** Create and maintain support groups for women in aviation to share experiences, resources, and strategies for overcoming challenges.

#### 3. Female Aviation Students

**Career Advice.** Provide female students with comprehensive career counseling and advice services, offering insights into the gender dynamics of the sector and pathways to success.

**Scholarships and Grants.** Increase the availability of scholarships and grants to female students pursuing degrees in aviation to mitigate financial barriers.

#### 4. Future Researchers

**Comprehensive Studies.** Conduct more comprehensive and inclusive studies with larger sample sizes and a wider range of geographic areas to gain a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in aviation.

**Longitudinal Research.** Implement longitudinal studies to monitor the advancement of women's careers in aviation over time and identify key factors influencing their retention and success.

#### 5. General Public

**Awareness Campaigns.** Launch public awareness campaigns to promote women's contributions to aviation, challenge misconceptions, and foster a more inclusive view of the sector.

**Education and Outreach Programs.** Develop programs that introduce young girls and women to aviation careers early on, highlighting the achievements of women in the field.

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