Original Article

Institutional Support Strategies for Academic Career Progression among Female Lecturers: A Case of Kyambogo University of Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Supporting the academic career progression of female lecturers has a positive impact on gender equality within society because universities play a big role in shaping society and building active citizens based on the fact many people who take up powerful roles in society have a background in higher education. It can also enhance their participation in higher education leadership because leadership qualities and potential in higher education are tied to academic rank. However, there is a low academic career progression of female lecturers at Kyambogo University. This qualitative study set out to examine the support strategies employed by the Kyambogo University of Uganda to advance the academic career progression of female lecturers. The study was positioned within an interpretative paradigm and employed a phenomenological approach to uncover the female academics' experiences. Both semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis data generation strategies were used in this study. In semi-structured interviews, a sample comprising eight female academics with not less than five years at the rank of a lecturer at Kyambogo University were selected, while documents such as the Human Resources Manual which enshrines the policy that guides the promotion of staff in the university and the Gender Policy were analysed. Data were thematically analysed according to phenomenological analysis such as strategies bracketing, clustering into themes, textual description, structural description, and textual-structural essence of the study. The findings which emerged from the study indicate that though the university has some support measures in place, the majority of female academics at Kyambogo University regard the available support strategies as inadequate for instance, most of them have inadequate skills in academic writing, there is inadequate funding of female academics, gender neutral promotional policies, unsatisfactory work environment and scarcity of workshops. The findings further indicate limited women's academic networks and inadequate mentorship collaboration among academics as the key factors that hamper female lecturers' academic career progression. The study recommends, among others, academic writing training, adequate funding, and redesigning promotion policies to suit female academic progression.

INTRODUCTION

The past decade has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of women joining higher academic institutions as academic staff (Akyol & Tanrisevdi, 2018; White & Nesic, 2014). However, this notable increase does not reflect women's increased numbers at higher academic ranks, as the majority are still concentrated at the lower levels of academic ranks (Kamerlin & Wittung, 2020; Tarimo & Swai, 2020). Research at the global level indicates that lack of acknowledgement from the universities' personnel and management, low publication output, heavy teaching load and family life are some of the factors that have contributed to the status quo (Aiston & Fo, 2020; Santos & Phu, 2019). As such, the majority of female academics reach retirement without being promoted (Fotaki, 2013). Other studies indicate that female lecturers seem to be more engaged in teaching and service-related activities within the university compared to research work (Obers, 2014; Santos & Phu, 2019). In Sub-Saharan African universities, the slow academic career progression of female academics is more pronounced (Dunne & Sayed, 2002; Subbaye & Dhunpath, 2016). Hence, the context examined in this study seems not to differ from the above analysis.

Studies found that a conducive university culture which realises the potential of academics regardless of gender contributes to the academic career progression of female academics (Chitsmatanga & Rembe, 2019; Murithii, 2018). However, it is indicated that in Uganda's context, the support provided for the academic career progression of female academics is inadequate based on the fact that it is influenced by a masculine managerial culture (Mulyampiti, 2018).

The Kyambogo University of Uganda was established in 2003 through a merger of three institutions, namely, the Institute of Teacher Education Kyambogo [ITEK], Uganda National Institute of Special Education [UNISE] and Uganda Polytechnic Kyambogo [UPK], with a vision of becoming a Centre of academic and professional excellence. As a support strategy for academic career progression, the University established a gender policy through the Directorate of Gender Mainstreaming which became fully operational in 2017. The University's Gender policy targets achieving, among others, understanding of and sensitivity to gender issues among university members, gender equity, equality and empowerment in leadership and management, review and engender the curricular in the university programs, mainstream gender in research and innovations, institutionalise gender responsive

planning and budgeting, secure environment for students and staff and evaluate and mainstream gender in existing and future policies and plans of the University (Kyambogo University, 2014). Despite these measures, Kyambogo University still experiences a slow academic career progression of female academics. This is evidenced by the very low percentages of females at senior academic ranks as given; female professors are 17 % while male professors are 83%, female Associate professors are 13%, and male associate professors are 87%, whereas at senior lecturer level, females are 25% and males at 75% (Kyambogo University, 2021). This reflects a low visibility of females in senior academic ranks.

Based on the above-documented data, there is low academic career progression of female lecturers. This raises questions on the adoption of support strategies for enhancing their academic career progression in terms of availability and accessibility at Kyambogo University. This study aims to qualitatively provide insights and experiences into the practical institutional support strategies for female lecturers' academic career progression at Kyambogo University. This is based on the fact that research in the field of higher education is required to address various issues, one being that of increasing women's contribution to knowledge generation and visibility in academia. Thus, this study is expected to provide useful suggestions and a deeper understanding of context-specific support measures for the academic career progression of female academics to managers in institutions of higher education, which may eventually increase the ascension of female academics to senior academic ranks. More specifically, this study is expected to change the way managers of Kyambogo University perceive and respond to the academic needs of female lecturers so that they can be supported to progress academically.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following main research question. What support strategies are employed for the academic career progression of female lecturers at Kyambogo University?

RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Review

Social cognitive career theory [SCCT] which was developed by Lent et al. (1994), embodies factors that facilitate individuals to exercise control over their own career development. One of its key components is about external factors to the person, which Lent et al. (1994) referred to as environmental support, and environmental influences such as social and organisational factors that can provide positive support or negative barriers (Flores and O'Brien, 2002). Later, Lent et al. (2000) categorised environmental factors into proximal and distal influences. They explained proximal influences as external barriers to career goals that occur immediately, whereas distal influences such as the opportunity for skill development that help to shape interests and self-cognition, need time to occur. These important environmental factors are assumed to influence cognitive-person aspects and other issues of career behaviour. From the theoretical perspective, this study intended to extend the existing knowledge of female lecturers' academic career progression with specific reference to the SCCT (Lent et al., 2000) that was used as the underlying theory for this research. The theory consists of contextual influences, outcome expectations or performance. In this study, contextual influences are represented by institutional support strategies and outcome expectations in academic career progression.

Empirical Review

Status of Female Academic Staff in Higher Education Institutions

Recent research findings recognise a significant increase in the number of female academics in higher education (Akyol & Tanrisevdi, 2018; White & Nesic, 2014). Nevertheless, female lecturers still experience a low academic career progression

(Morley, 2014; Tarimo & Swai, 2020). The academic career trajectory of female academics is characterised by numerous hurdles, such as motherhood and domestic tasks (Gallardo, 2021). Lack of adequate support from the universities' personnel and management is the cause of burnout and occupational stress among female academics, which compounds the status quo (Falola et al., 2020; Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019). This seems to explain why the majority of female academics finally exit academia without being promoted.

The literature further recognises individual university requirements to move from one academic ladder to another besides having a doctoral degree. Eddy and Ward (2015); Obers (2014) concur that in some universities, the academic progression would depend on research supervision up to the completion and publication of academic papers. Due to such high demands of the higher education environment, the majority of female academics are still concentrated in the lower ranks of assistant lecturer and lecturer (Mulyampiti, 2018; Santos & Phu, 2019). Additionally, studies on the status of female academics in higher education reflect female lecturers' low publication output (Aiston et al., 2020; Lerchenmueller & Sorenson, 2018), yet faculty evaluations and promotions criteria are increasingly tied to research productivity measured in terms of publishing in top journals (Morley, 2014; White & Nesic, 2014). This could be attributed to the fact that females are more concentrated in disciplines which may not foster high levels of research productivity, such as social sciences (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Shah et al., 2020). Furthermore, academics in social sciences often supervise in areas outside their own research focus (Moodly & Toni, 2017; Obers, 2014). Consequently, natural science academics, most of whom are male, have more time to research and publish than academics in the social sciences, where most female academics are concentrated (Shah et al., 2020).

Other studies depict that research articles in natural science disciplines are published more quickly than those in social science disciplines (Aiston & Jung, 2015). It is also revealed that researchers in the natural sciences tend to work more collaboratively within research groups which puts them at an advantage in such a way that innovative work is more easily recognised and induction and socialisation for the young researcher happen relatively much quicker (Obers, 2014; Shober, 2014). This implies that on average, the natural science disciplines are likely to produce more research at a faster rate than the social science disciplines. It is further argued that even in the natural science fields, females are more involved in the human, political and social aspects of working in research groups, whereas their male counterparts deal more in research leading to publications (Eddy & Ward, 2015). With more females in the social sciences and more men in the natural sciences, the research productivity of females may be affected by the discipline in which they are more concentrated (Su et al., 2015), consequently hampering their academic career progression. Unfortunately, little is mentioned on context-specific support measures for enhancing the academic career progression of female academics.

Literature also suggests that female lecturers are more involved in teaching (Chen & Hsieh, 2019; Morley, 2014). This means that large teaching workloads leave them with insufficient time and resources to attend to their research obligations (Dobele et al., 2014; Obers, 2014). However, Subbaye (2017) posit that in some universities such as KwaZulu- Natal, teaching has been incorporated into the academic promotions policy and procedures on an equal footing with research as a way of enhancing the academic career progression of female academics. Furthermore, female lecturers hardly get opportunities to deliver keynote speeches, become members of the boards of prestigious journals and academic networks, and build relationships with the government through project collaboration (Chen & Hsieh, 2019; Morley,

2014). Such a situation, coupled with numerous challenges faced by women, such as reproductive gender roles, gender stereotypes, and unfriendly work environments, calls for the support of female lecturers to enhance their academic career progression.

Institutional Support Strategies

Studies depict various strategies for supporting the academic career progression of female lectures in Higher education institutions such as mentorship (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019), funding (Falola et al., 2020), women's academic networks (Ashencaen- Crabtree & Shiel, 2019) and supportive institutional policies (Aiston, Fo & Law, 2020). It is established that mentorship is crucial for women's career progression (Chen & Hsieh, 2019; Meschitti et al., 2017). Consequently, universities have instituted mentorship programs to help female academics, especially those of lower academic rank, learn the demands and culture of the university environment (Sadiq et al., 2019). This is substantiated by studies carried out in developed countries which reveal that there is a lot of mentorship going on, especially for female lecturers, to help them go through the transition process as they engage in the process of socialisation and identity formation as researchers (Meschitti et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2015).

It is further argued that mentoring enables female academics to negotiate the expectations, responsibilities and hurdles they face, especially those at the beginning of their careers (Bottoms et al., 2013; Chitsamatanga et al., 2018). Mentorship is formally provided depending on the needs, interests, and career stages of female academics as a way of providing both career and social support (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019; Zambrana et al., 2015). Formal mentoring is basically carried out following well-established institutional guidelines in the form of training and coaching by attaching a junior to a senior academic, as well as availability of resources (Meschitti et al., 2017; Moodly & Toni, 2017). It is established that female academics with

mentors publish more articles, feel more confident in their capabilities, and are more satisfied with their careers (Chitsamatanga, 2016; Kalpazidou-Schmidt & Faber, 2016). However, little is known about the mentoring of female academics at Kyambogo University.

In addition, training equips female academics with the knowledge, skills, and capacity to execute the core functions of the university (Mandleco, 2010; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). It is argued that training female academics is more needed in the area of scientific writing as the current studies inform that female academics are cited less in renowned journals and tend to be under-represented in sole author positions (Morley, 2014; Scharber et al., 2017). Nevertheless, Stockyard and Lewis (2013), Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) confirm that collaborative research and writing groups among female academics can contribute to mentorship when a more experienced faculty member works with and guides a less experienced faculty colleague with professional nurturance.

The formal professional networks which are facilitated by institutions of higher learning give female lecturers an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences to establish ties with other female academics at both local and international levels, which can be of benefit to their career progression (Ehido et al., 2019; Pifer et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2015). The established connections with people, organisations, and institutions enhance the intellectual and occupational knowledge of an individual (Davis & Warfield, 2011) and have enhanced female lecturers' professional success, hence, increasing their visibility in academia (Thomas et al., 2015; Kalpazidou & Faber, 2016). Similarly, Ehido et al. (2019), Davis and Warfield (2011) argue that networks have equally contributed to females' building of successful careers because networking groups can be an efficient way to meet valuable contacts, establish ties and linkages, share experiences, and gain opportunities and resources that are vital in an individual's career progression

(Pifer et al., 2015; Stockyard & Lewis, 2013; Thomas et al., 2015). It is established that women involved in networks are more supportive of each other through sharing of experiences, which helps them to gain confidence and leadership skills, as well as to give each other constructive criticism and feedback that improves their research work (Bottoms et al., 2013; Macoun and Miller, 2014; Martinez et al., 2015). This is in congruence with Ehido et al. (2019)'s observation that female-only networks offer social support and friendship and provide a sense of reciprocity that can itself be empowering. Women tend to seek emotional and social support from their networks.

Studies indicate that informal groups help females to establish networks that provide unique settings in which they share experiences and learn new skills; get feedback on their work performance and progress, thus, helping them to navigate challenges; establish a culture of collaboration that is success-driven (Macoun & Miller, 2014; Stockyard & Lewis, 2013). Consequently, the norms of inclusiveness, care and mutual support within female academics' professional groups strengthen their sense of belonging, creating a positive impact on their career lives which are vital for female lecturers' academic career progression (Martinez et al., 2015; Stockyard & Lewis, 2013). Additionally, collegial support, which is provided by female academic peer members among one another and to early career female faculty members in the form of assigning challenging tasks as well as facilitating access to academic networks, resources, and further job opportunities, broadens female lecturers' knowledge and experience, leading to subsequent academic career progression (Ehido et al., 2019; Oti, 2013).

The existence of a woman-friendly work environment through the effective implementation of family-responsive policies gives higher education institutions an advantage in attracting and retaining talented female academics (Chen & Hsieh, 2019; O'Brien et al., 2015). Therefore, the institutions are trying to establish supportive work environments which favour female academics' career progression. Such an environment is characterised by flexible teaching timetables, parental leaves, work-friendly policies and child-care arrangements to support working parents, especially females (O'Brien et al., 2015; Martinez et al., 2015). Consequently, gender equity laws which can buffer women from undesirable impacts of gender inequalities have been implemented (Chen & Hsieh, 2019). Unfortunately, the manner in which work-friendly policies are implemented is still questionable (Aiston et al., 2020).

Financial support provided to female academics enables them to carry out research and subsequent publications, which are key requirements for female lecturers' academic career progression (Aiston & Jung, 2015; Santos et al., 2019). Whereas in the developing world, female academics' career programs are largely driven by resources from development partners, such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and SIDA from Sweden (Oladunni, 2014), in the developed world, most of the women study programs are driven by resources from within. In Germany, for example, The Women Professors Program extends its funding to female academics who are interested in furthering their studies (Löther, 2019) and gaining more skills in research work and writing skills. While in Australia, women academics are given funds to enable them to disseminate their findings at conferences, and female researchers get grants through research teams to facilitate their research works though not with ease (Heffernan, 2018). On the other hand, it is observed that much as funding is provided to female academics in the form of scholarships and research grants, what they receive is very low compared to their male counterparts (Aiston &Jung, 2015; Rathgeber, 2013). It would be imperative to understand the criteria used to fund academic staff's professional activities, most especially female lecturers a Kyambogo University. It is against this background, therefore, that the

study examined the support strategies employed by Kyambogo University to enhance the academic career progression of female lecturers.

This study approached support strategies from the institutional standpoint, specifically exploring how Kyambogo University supports the academic career progression of female academics. According to SCCT, environmental factors of which universities are part influence academic career progression; however, this is generic. Furthermore, most studies focus on progression to administrative ranks, not academic leadership (Chen and Hsieh, 2018; Chitsamatanga, 2016; Eddy and Ward, 2015) and many others are undertaken in the developed world (Aiston &Jung, 2015; Aiston et al., 2020; Heffernan, 2018; Löther, 2019). This poses theoretical, conceptual and contextual gaps. Therefore, this study aimed to address these gaps by exploring institutional support strategies for academic career progression among female lecturers at Kyambogo University.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was conducted by adopting the interpretative paradigm aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of varied and multiple interpretations of the support strategies employed by Kyambogo University to advance the academic career progression of female academics. The study focused on female academics at the rank of lecturer for a period of not less than five years. A total of eight female academics were identified through purposive sampling from eight different faculties. The participants who were selected to be interviewed represented varied ages and academic qualifications because it was found that some lecturers have master's degrees. A semi-structured interview technique was adopted whereby face-to-face interviews were conducted to generate primary data. Face-to-face interviews were deemed important to get an in-depth understanding of the complexity of institutional support and to capture female lecturers' experiences.

An in-depth analysis of the experiences was done, and experiences were later grouped under the following major themes: mentoring, work environment and academic networks. Secondary data were generated from the policy documents, fact books, and other relevant documents on how the university supports female lecturers to progress academically at Kyambogo University to reinforce the primary findings. The general procedures for preparing and analysing the data included; making statements from semi-structured interviews, converting significant statements into meaningful themes, interpreting and presenting the essence of the study in the form of themes and categories.

FINDINGS

This study focused on support strategies employed by the Kyambogo University of Uganda to advance the academic career progression of female academicians. Based on semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, four major themes emerged: namely, funding, training programs and mentoring, availability of resources and university working environment. The themes are discussed below.

Funding: On the issue of funding, findings from the study information that there are some female lecturers who confirmed to have received sponsorship for their PhDs, and others agreed that they were sponsored to attend conferences and workshops while others were facilitated by the university to have their articles published. However, five participants indicated that they felt the manner in which scholarships were awarded by the university lacked transparency. While they stressed that university scholarships were being given to academic staff, they were quick to indicate that the process through which study grants were given was not clear, as voiced by Participant C below.

> *The reality is that there is no preferential treatment for women as far as funding is concerned. Men get funding faster than women, what is so frustrating is that when I put in my*

application for a university scholarship, I kept inquiring about the status of my application and it took a year before I got feedback that I was not successful even without a clear explanation why I was not successful.

In the same way, participant D expounds on the challenges of accessing financial assistance from the university despite its being essential by explaining the hurdles associated with getting funded.

Getting funds here is a frustrating process, men get staff developments funds faster than women, there is a lot of chasing to do, you feel like giving up most, especially when you do not get a clear explanation why you were not successful, yet the male colleagues with whom you put in the applications went through.

The same was echoed by one participant who felt that the process of awarding scholarships through staff development was not transparent and reflected tribalism as she went on to say that;

I applied for staff development funds with five colleagues' two of whom were males and we were three ladies. Surprisingly, the two males and a lady, all from the same region, were successful. It was me and another female colleague from the same tribal group that were not successful ….!!!!. Is that being fair?

Similarly, respondent H highlighted the following.

The process of getting funding at this university is very irritating; I requested money to go and present a paper at a conference one month before the conference, but the time for the conference came before I had got the money. I ended up using my own money. Much as I benefited more as an individual but the university also benefits because when I publish a paper, it equally contributes to the volume of what the university produces…. which may contribute to its ranking.

Relating to the above responses, it can be concluded that inadequate funding and the manner in which funds are provided to a certain extent negatively impacts on academic career progression of female lecturers, hence creating some form of pressure for these academics as they realise that it may be difficult for them to climb to higher academic ranks without writing, presenting, and publishing any papers.

Training programs: Concerning training programs, four participants indicated that they felt they lacked adequate training in academic writing. While they stressed that training was available, they were quick to indicate that it was not adequate. Furthermore, they explained that they had never received any training organised by the university specifically for women. Additionally, the existence of few academics with doctoral degrees also limited the number of competent mentors and co-authors unless one had expertise in their area of study. This is substantiated by the remarks below from different participants. Participant D remarked that,

Although I seriously need help in academic writing, I have not heard of or attended any training organised by the university as regards that issue. The training I attended was on quality assurance, and this included both male and female lecturers. Unfortunately, in my section, there is only one female Doctor who is always very busy to give a helping hand. Whenever I approach her to help me read through my work, she claims to be very busy.

Such a situation indicates that female lectures seem to be interested in their academic career progression but are limited by inadequate writing skills and no relevant training, while others even lack a starting point, as explained by Participant A:

"You know, writing a scientific paper is not an easy thing …There are a number of challenges involved; if you have not been trained in scientific writing, it is always going to be

difficult to write and publish papers, which is, I think we are lacking as female lecturers."

All participants unanimously agreed that the only way to prolific academic writing is through training and having a mentor or role model with adequate experience in publishing. In this regard, participant H informed:

I cannot proceed to the next academic level without publications, yet it is not easy to make a breakthrough without lots of coaching to be able to come up with an academically sound paper. Unfortunately, in this university, getting someone to do the coaching is not easy. First of all, those with writing skills are few in number; secondly, they are not willing to help just like that.

The above responses indicate that the university should organise training for academic staff in the area of academic writing, though it is not only in the area of academic writing that female lecturers need support, as the subsequent section indicates.

Mentorship and academic networks: The findings revealed that formal mentoring did not exist in the university, and networking was weak. Participant A confessed that:

I cannot really point at someone that I thought really mentored my career. No . . . I do not really have a key mentor to guide me or to tell me how to get down this road to this academic rank I have. I am kind of just hacking my own way through the forest. Besides, the university has no arrangement in place for mentoring early female academics.

With University initiated academic networks, all participants agreed that networking and collaborating opportunities hardly existed beyond what they had created for themselves. Participant E stated:

There are collaboration opportunities with some female faculty such as myself, but there

are few collaborative opportunities with senior faculty within and outside the university". In addition, participant H remarked, "I have not interacted much with academics outside this university. The only times I have interacted were in meetings with local language lecturers, and that was at Makerere University.

The above responses indicate that female lecturers have not yet benefited from networks, an issue that is further emphasised by Participant A:

"It is of recent that I have started to network, but only with the colleagues I like and with whom I share interests. I never consider how I can benefit from each one of them".

Availability of study resources: All participants agreed that they have access to the internet and that the university subscribes to various credible journals, which eases their access to recent journal articles. Whereas some participants agreed that they could access journal articles through the university website while at home, others were quick to add that these facilities can only be accessed while at the campus, something which interferes with research work while off campus, as explained by Participant D that:

"Towards the weekend when I am at the campus, I have to down load Journal articles to read while at home since I cannot access important journal article while at home, besides data is expensive."

In the same vein, it was indicated that when off campus, an individual has to rely on personal funds to get data which constrains budgets hence reducing the volume of work a person would do if that person had access to the internet while off campus as disclosed by participant B:

Writing is costly in terms of time and money. When I am on campus, I find it difficult to access the internet because data is very expensive. What I do, is download many articles to read while off campus, but this also requires time

which sometimes I fail to get due to my busy schedule. Worse still, accessing journals to which the university subscribes is impossible when not on the university internet.

In the same vein, Participant C stated:

I need access to the internet, especially when I am outside in the field because this is when I get plenty of time to do some reading without interference, especially in the evenings when I retire from the day's activities. Unfortunately, buying data is costly, it is also not easy to move with a bulk of study materials, especially when using public transport means.

The preceding responses from participants C and B imply that the female lecturer's rate of writing is hampered by the availability of consistent internet. Yet with their home responsibilities, they can hardly concentrate on academic writing. Unfortunately, without writing and publications, their ascension to higher academic ranks cannot be realised. Although the University has tried to ensure connectivity, it would be imperative for the university to enable its academic staff to easily access those journals to which the university subscribes even when off campus.

Working environment: Female lecturers feel that they are not adequately supported by the university in its environment, which is so demanding. For instance, institutional policies, particularly those relating to family obligations, are nonexistent despite the fact that the workplace should be sensitive to women's issues, such as childbearing and family-related concerns. All participants admitted that the university lags in this area, as voiced below by Participant B;

I find it difficult now to concentrate on developing my career when my family is still young. Every morning I first prepare my kids and drop them at school, then continue to the university. You know getting a reliable maid is not easy. The university kindergarten is of a low

standard compared to those outside; otherwise, I would bring my kids to study here.

Similarly, participant C who had just embarked on her PhD studies, said that;

I have recently enrolled for a PhD. Though, as a young mother, I feel the university is totally insensitive to my needs. But I am also hesitant to complain about my needs as a mom because I have internalised the version of men as academicians. I do not want to be perceived as needing things that men do not need. It seems everything here is measured on masculine standards.

The above comments reflect the absence of family-supportive policies and practices, an issue that greatly slows down female academic career progression, especially for mothers with young families. Along similar lines, other respondents agreed that the university has in place policies which provide for the promotion of academic staff; however, these need to be modified to cater for women as a group which is challenged, as informed by respondent D That:

If only the Human Resources Policy on the promotion of academic staff would mainly focus on the quality of papers required for academic staff to get a promotion instead of focusing on quantity, I would now be at the level of senior lecturer because I have few papers which are published in high-ranking journals such as Springer and Emerald. But since quantity is also considered. I cannot be promoted to the next level.

The promotion process equally delays the academic career progression of female lecturers and sometimes excludes them from higher academic ranks. In this regard, participant D explained:

I applied to be promoted to the senior lecturer with three male colleagues; two months after submission of our application forms, my male colleagues had already received feedback as

regards their promotion; when I inquired about mine, I was informed that the reviewers of my articles had not yet sent feedback. Four months later, my colleagues received their letters of promotion. You see…. That is so frustrating.

Lack of adequate working space is also another challenge that hampers academic writing since this hinders full concentration, which is a vital psychological condition during the writing process as participant A explains,

"Sometimes I feel like not going to the library, but because this office is shared and sometimes it doubles as a lecture room, I can hardly do my private reading from here. So, if I do not go to the library once or twice a week, it means the whole week is forgone".

On the same issue, participant B remarked that;

As you can also see, this is more of a store than an office, the aeration is not good, and I do not feel secure reading from here beyond 6.00 pm. I either go home or to the library, but the home environment is not as conducive to reading as there is this and that to put right.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reflect that the university has support measures for facilitating the academic career progression of staff, though the measures do not specifically target female academics, and the manner in which they are implemented is a source of dissatisfaction among female lecturers. These themes are discussed below.

Funding

Though the universities provide funding for the professional development of staff (Aiston &Jung, 2015; Rathgeber, 2013), the narratives by the participants revealed that female lecturers still find it difficult to access it easily. Participants clearly reflected that there is no specific arrangement for providing funding to female lecturers for professional training, as observed by Heffernan

(2018) that the process of accessing funds for further training is more painful to female academics who are most times regarded as the 'other'. Male faculty most often are given first priority, something regarded as gender discrimination on the side of women. This is coupled with implicit tribal bias, prolonged chasing and delayed feedback which makes the whole process of getting a scholarship from the university frustrating hence putting off many female academics whose hands are already full. It is important to note, as observed by Chitsamatanga et al. (2018), that when academics are sponsored to acquire higher academic qualifications and attend conferences or any relevant training, both locally and internationally, it helps them to acquire friends, exposure to academic gurus who may act as mentors and to establish social networks which are crucial for academic career progression. In the same way, instil confidence and career guidance to advance their career mobility.

Training

On the provision of training programs for female academic staff, all the participants felt the university was sorely lacking in mentoring female faculty for academic career progression. Despite the fact that mentoring enables female academics to negotiate the expectations, responsibilities and hurdles they encounter on their career journey (Bottoms et al., 2013; Chitsamatanga et al., 2018). It was established many female academics lacked skills in academic writing, though promotion to the rank of senior lecturer is tied to the number of publications one has with credible Journals (Morley, 2014; Scharber et al., 2017). The low publication rate of female academics also explains why there are few female writers who could mentor others. More still, those with writing skills are not willing to groom the upcoming ones, a situation referred to as the "Queen Bee attitude" (Derks et al., 2015). Such circumstances forced female lecturers to find their own mentors outside the university though this also created a gap for the lack of opportunities to

collaborate with other faculty, particularly senior faculty. Furthermore, women informed that getting funds for attending conferences and article publication is another hassle, despite the fact that academic promotion is tied to the number of publications one has. Additionally, for the university system to advance and be ranked among the best in the world, there is a need for more institutional support in the areas of research grants, conference sponsorship, publication support and collaboration, especially for female academics because they constitute a big section in the academia. (Okiki, 2013).

University Working Environment

All the participants were very clear about the unsatisfactory work environment. This was evidenced by the lack of support for family responsibilities and an unwelcoming climate at both the department and university levels. Though the work environment and the institutional supports received determine the engagement and the commitment of employees of which women are part and their performance outcomes (Falola et al., 2020), the study findings revealed that there were no strategies at the departmental level for enhancing academic career progression of female lecturers. This resonates with earlier findings, such as Su et al. (2015), that academic departments' obligation to a gender diversity strategy and the subsequent academic career progression of female academics is related to the head of departments 'administrative power and their valuation of existing gender diversity status. These findings, therefore, suggest that the available strategies are top-down, which probably explains the weak implementation.

Three of the female lecturers expressed their views about an institutional program to increase diversity and also facilitate the academic career progression of female academics, which should make the institution a more accommodating place. However, this requires the university to put in place stronger women-friendly policies such as on parents, especially with little children, promotion and staff

development as put forward by Falola et al. (2020) that such an environment can motivate women to aspire for promotions to higher academic ranks. Equally important is the need to increase the number of women in key decision-making positions and personnel committees. This was also revealed by Morley (2014) that women's numbers in key positions make their impact felt, especially when it comes to making decisions which affect women. In fact, many theoretical and descriptive studies, such as Ajayi et al. (2015) and Falola et al. (2020), link the limited availability of family-friendly policies to women's lower status within higher academic ranks. Similarly, the manner in which basic communication and decision-making processes are made should be in such a way that it does not exclude female academics.

The Findings of the study also emphasised the role of academic networks in career progression. All participants commented on the fact that as their institution is growing, more emphasis is put on research; however, this is associated with the growing pains of inadequate support for female researchers from the university. One important aspect of the lack of support the participants perceived was the lack of socialisation initiatives at the university. This probably relates back to the women's cultural traditions of collaborative and communal efforts, as well as advancing the collective, not the individual (Boyd et al., 2010). This study found that female lecturers' desire for collaborative initiatives and professional support was so great that many created their own work groups when none were forthcoming from the university. This finding is supported by Leathwood and Read (2009), that many women academics continue to 'construct a "space of their own" within academia that provides many pleasures, comforts, and rewards. Unfortunately, many of these groups created are not for academic purposes, many of them are for social identification and solving social problems, and others are business-oriented issues.

The study also found that the low participation by female lecturers in academic networks makes it hard for them to access network resources. This puts them at a disadvantage in such a way that their achievements will remain invisible in the university due to limited publicity, which negatively impacts their academic career progression. This is as put by Brink and Benschop (2014) that networks provide opportunities for social capital, friendship and effective support. Consequently, enhancing their empowerment, improved visibility, and support. The study findings established that female lecturers have not yet benefited from academic networks as much as their male counterparts. The question remains whether female academics can borrow a leaf from traditional male-dominated networks to establish their own networks in the face of a feminist perception that male-dominant networks have been reproducing social structures and academic culture traditionally oppressive to women.

CONCLUSIONS

As this study has revealed that the university has some support strategies in place, such as scholarships, internet connectivity and E-resources, there are still a number of issues that bar female academics from ascending to senior academic ranks. The study concludes that female academics still experience challenges such as a lack of adequate scientific writing workshops, inadequate funding and a lack of conducive environmental culture that stimulates networking and formal mentoring. Yet, the influence of institutional support on the academic career progression of female lecturers cannot be overemphasised. This is due to the fact that female lecturers constitute a big section of academic staff, implying their visibility and contribution to knowledge generation can contribute to the university's ranking among the best universities globally. Since most female lecturers are willing to progress in their careers, institutional support can be used to motivate them to be highly engaged in those activities that contribute to their academic career progression, which include but are not limited to outstanding research productivity, networking, citations, outstanding teaching/transfer of knowledge, mentoring and community service. It is further concluded that the institutional supports in terms of research grants, conference support, publication support, user-friendly e-learning platforms, woman-friendly work environment and study resources increase the female lecturers' visibility and favourable competition with their male colleagues in the university.

Recommendations

The university should task Individual heads of departments to produce periodic reports on the status of the academic career progression of female lecturers. This may be an effective instrument for identifying specific areas in which female lecturers need help and the appropriate support strategies. In the same way, the university management should strive to provide a working environment that encourages female academics to be more productive and engaged by designing women-friendly policies. This is because of the fact that the value of institutional support will likely influence the aspirations and commitment outcomes of the female lecturers, who also constitute a big section of the academic community. The university management should put formal mentoring structures in place where each early career female academic is attached to an experienced senior academic. The university management should introduce grants which are only competed for by female academics. As the university integrates better institutional support, it will be in a better position to cope with a rapidly changing and competitive academic environment.

Areas for Further Research

As this study was conducted in only one university, it would be valuable to explore support strategies in other universities. Therefore, the scope of the study can be extended to generate further empirical insights through a comparative analysis by

including more universities. It would also be important to study female lecturers' perceptions of support strategies in various contexts.

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