



Narratives of Strategies Used By Female Academics in South African and Zimbabwean Universities to Overcome Barriers to Career Development

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ABSTRACT This paper sought to compare the views of senior and junior female academics in South African and Zimbabwean universities on strategies used to overcome barriers to career development. Purposive sampling was used to select 20 participants in this qualitative inquiry through in-depth semi-structured and focus group interviews. The study established that the majority of senior and junior academics in South African and Zimbabwean universities perceived family and spousal support, self-confidence and collaboration with other academics as crucial factors in developing their careers. Moreover, formalised mentoring, gender responsive and conducive organisational culture and research outputs were identified as other strategies to be adopted. The paper recommends that career mobility of female academics be promoted through formalised mentoring; ongoing staff development programmes. Tapping on pockets of best practices from other universities on how to implement gender equality policies that recognise career growth of both genders particularly, for female academics is also recommended.

INTRODUCTION

A key function of universities is to enhance the participation and role of females in decision making processes (UNESCO 1998; Morley and Lugg 2009). Despite years of advocacy, there is a dearth of females in leadership positions due to a number of barriers that they encounter in their career trajectories (Kipsoi and Kimengi 2014). This has resulted in the leaking pipeline due to a lack of equal opportunities and enabling mechanisms to their career growth which has remained elusive (Nguyen 2012; Brower et al. 2019). As a result, Aiston (2011) accentuates that female academics have to be responsible for their own career growth and must learn to see themselves as the centre of their own biographies by identifying strategies that can assist them to thwart barriers to their career development.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This part of the paper reviews preliminary documented literature and the theoretical framework of the study.

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Theoretical Framework

Liberal Feminist Theory

According to Chitsamatanga et al. (2017, 2018), the liberal feminist theory addresses women's lives and experiences (Ikpeze 2015) and focuses on challenging the status quo that disadvantages women (Marshall 1984, 1992; Chitsamatanga et al. 2018). The theory was used in this study because it promotes equality between males and females and is against oppression and male supremacy (Women Leadership and Governance Institute 2002; Enyew and Mihrete 2018). The liberal feminist theory is concerned about giving a choice to female (academics) in universities so that they can be able to exercise control over their own destinies. Therefore, this theory advocates ways in which female (academics) can empower themselves and how they can develop emancipatory consciousness (Kincheloe and McLaren 1994). This can be achieved by rising above the generally held beliefs, norms and values with regard to their career development particularly in universities. Its agenda has informed and underpinned feminists' ideological strategy for fighting for female rights (Mandoga 2017).

Therefore, the main contribution of this theory is that it has provided massive ideas and

information for the implementation of equal opportunities and affirmative action policies as well as the strategies that can be implemented to promote career mobility of females. These have in turn contributed to the voice and abilities of the female academics being recognised in learning institutions as they advocate for equal footing in academia (Chitsamatanga et al. 2018). Adopting this theory was advantageous as it clearly makes the point that the gender of academics should not be implicated in the systems and power structures of universities. Hence, this theory was commensurate with the study because it offers a critical analysis of the workplace and suggests tangible and practical strategies that could be effective in resolving workplace inequities which in turn result to barriers to career development (Khattak 2011). The researchers took cognizance of the fact that functions of universities in South Africa and Zimbabwe, are guided by the legal frameworks, policies and statutes that guide university operations to ensure that they are in synergy with the world's best practices with regard to gender equality. Therefore, it was critical that a theoretical framework such as the feminist theory be adopted as it constitutes a comprehensive and interpretive approach to issues concerning female academics in universities with regard to their career mobility.

Literature Review

Globally, there is a marked pyramid effect, where the bulk of females are at the lower rungs of the academic leadership ladder and very few are at the top. Statistically, studies indicate that within the academic circles, a mere 7 percent of the universities worldwide are managed by women (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa 2010). Evidently, more males as compared to females hold leadership positions such as Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Registrars, Deans and Heads of Departments which exude hierarchal control and power (Zinyemba 2013). Admittedly, only a few females have made it to the top. Data from the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) also shows that the academic staff above senior lecturer position comprised of 74.7 percent males, whereas female academics constituted only 25.3 percent females (Singh 2008). A study conducted by Mbepera (2015), advances that in the United Kingdom, a total of 44 percent comprised of female academics between 2009

and 2010. Ironically, by 2012 female vice chancellors were 14.2 percent, as compared to a staggering 85.8 percent of male academics (Mbepera 2015).

The Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) is not immune to the foregoing reality. It also boasts of a high percentage of males as vice-chancellors and an insignificant percentage of women as vice-chancellors (SARUA 2008). In addition, Guramatunhu-Mudiwa's (2010) research, also carried out within the SADC region, shows that out of 117 universities, 105 universities (89.7%) were led by males and only 12 universities (10.3%) were led by females. Similarly, in South Africa De la Rey (2017) advances that the number of female Vice Chancellors had decreased from 4 to 3 since 2010 yet, the number of universities in South Africa had increased from 23 to 26 universities since 2010. Thus, the above statistics reveal that progress in empowering females to realise career growth and retain them within the university system is still painfully slow. There is, hence need for the female academics to identify strategies to promote their career development at personal, societal and institutional levels.

Given this backdrop, many countries have ratified and endorsed several national, regional and international resolutions whose primary principles and guidelines act as a framework for female empowerment in private and public institutions (Shakib 2014). These include: The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948*; *Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1978* (Akala 2019); *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPA) of 1995* and the *SADC Protocol on Gender and Development of 2008* (Sahle 2017). These instruments recognise that females have always been historically disadvantaged thus, were enacted to address issues of female empowerment and gender equality in line with international standards and norms between both genders (UNWomen 2014; SADC 2012).

However, though the above mentioned instruments are meant to proscribe and redress gender equity vis-à-vis career growth particularly in top positions, they are at the same time viewed as toothless and failing to send a strong signal that can be utilised to support other rights of gender power dynamics in and outside universities. This has resulted in universities facing increasingly complex challenges in attract-

ing and curbing the exiting rate of female academics in universities. However, evidence abounds that highlights that female academics are impervious in taking risks (Ha et al. 2018). This has led to a number of barriers that act as contributory factors to their delayed career mobility.

Barriers Affecting Career Development of Female Academics

Coronel et al. (2010) and Gaidzanwa (2005) have singled out lack of access to mentors, glass ceiling, chilly organisational culture, dearth in research publications and failure to strike a balance between work and family roles as impeding factors that keep female academics stagnant in their careers (Chitsamatanga et al. 2017). As a result, a call has been made that universities should strive to create an organisational culture that fosters diversity; enhances career development and utilizes the expertise and capabilities of male and female academics (Wright et al. 2018). Desselles et al. (2017) also advance that a gender responsive organisational culture is important, as it gives both genders the opportunity to rethink universities as work places capable of bridging the patriarchal gap; breaking of the glass ceiling while, encouraging career mobility of female academics in the process.

Research Publications

Publication is recognised all over the world as an integral part of an academic career as well as a pre-condition for academic promotion and advancement universally (Nafukho et al. 2019; Gaidzanwa 2005). The issue of research publications is quite complex because of different institutional demands, discipline differences and the evaluation of research output. This can lead to a bias towards research based activities particularly for female academics due to lack of exposure to a culture of academic research, and unfavourable evaluation of research output (Nielsen 2017; Turk et al. 2018).

In addition Muriithi et al. (2018) and Wright et al. (2018) cite lack of senior scientists, non-participation in scholarly conferences, language and technological challenges, heavy teaching and administrative loads and lack of funding as other challenges that barricade career growth of females. The workload systems continues to work as a disadvantage to some female academ-

ics seeking to improve their research output (Kataeva and DeYoung 2017). Undeniably so, academic publishing is suffering at the hands of hegemonic institutions of inequalities that privilege preconceived ideals of masculinity and maleness over femininity and femaleness, thus hindering the career trajectory of females and narrowing the doors to academic publications (Wanger 2016; Nielsen 2016; Payer 2017).

Thus, having female academics scripts peer reviewed by male academics or Queen Bees is more like promoting the status quo in Universities. Further, support from these findings can be gleaned from the works of Mabileka (2002) who also discovered in her study that female academics felt their manuscripts and publications were viewed in a gendered way. Further to this discussion, Hemmings et al. (2003) postulate that some Universities have “healthy incentives” for their academics who are research active and these incentives tend to exclude female academics “unintentionally” due to lack of tangible research output. Therefore, Nieuwoudt and Wilcocks (2005) and Mandoga (2017) confirm the widely held beliefs that lack of research output from female academics is tied to lack of organisational and financial support, failure to find appropriate research topics and gender stereotyping and discrimination. These views are further advanced by recent research that credibility is directed to research achievement as compared to teaching and this has always worked as an advantage to male academics (Sadiq et al. 2019). Thus, Mokhele (2013), opines that more critical attention needs to be paid to institutional and structural impairments so that the problem of ostracism of female researchers within the universities can be redressed.

Likewise, the high rejection rate of research manuscripts is also one of the reasons why female academics fail to publish and are unable to develop their careers. Summers (2001) posits that the rejection rate of manuscripts by internationally renowned research journals averages around 90 percent. These views are also echoed by Albertyn et al. (2007) who stated that in South Africa, 73 accredited journals unanimously agreed that the rejection rate of research manuscripts was exceptionally high. For instance, in one university in Zimbabwe, male academics contributed 83 percent of research output and articles produced. If comparisons were to be made, the picture in South Africa is not at all different from the Zimbabwean situation.

For illustrative purposes, in 2005 female academics contributed only 14 percent and 37 percent of research output in their respective universities, notwithstanding the fact that South Africa produces 80 percent of the basic research done in Southern Africa. On an international sphere, studies indicate that male academics publish 8 percent more articles. For instance, in Japan 90 percent research output is through male academics (Horta et al. 2012). Thus, it is critical that these statistics are kept in mind as they indicate how a dearth of published work by female academics impacts negatively on getting better salaries, advancement and most importantly, job security (Payer 2017; Turk et al. 2018). *One would therefore ask, where does this leave the female academics who already are compounded with numerous challenges with regard to their career development in universities?*

In Taiwan, Coleman (2003) carried out a comparative study of research publications between senior and junior female academics. The results showed that junior academics had more publications than senior female academics. An interesting observation made by the researchers is that under “normal” circumstances it is the senior female academics that have to show the ropes to the junior academics of how to publish, research, and teach. Given these set of circumstances, one would ask, *is it that female academics do not see the value of linking their career development with research and publication? Or, they have been failed by a system which has a strong sense of power imbalance?* Reason being, barriers to research and publication by female academics will not occur from nowhere (Hemmings and Russell 2010), therefore intervention strategies that begin from known to unknown should be implemented within the universities.

Latest scholarly works indicate how a dearth of published work by female academics impacts negatively on their career advancement (Payer 2017; Turk et al. 2018). Unfortunately, a majority of the female academics have remained consumers of knowledge in universities, instead of producing the knowledge (Benamer and Bakoush 2009; Schaber et al. 2017). As a result, pressure has been put on universities worldwide to lift their game on research output for female academics by having in place role models, regardless of gender, to act as mentors to enhance career development of female academics (Howe-

Walsh and Turnbull 2016). This will avoid a situation whereby the productivity gap widens and female academics continue being viewed as novices in their career trajectories.

Mentoring

Extant literature views mentoring as a powerful intervention tool that can be adopted to assist, support and guide academics in their career trajectory especially females. Accordingly, Chitsamatanga et al. (2018), Ingersoll (2012), Abugre and Kpinpuo (2017), and Beech and Norris (2018) suggest that academics who undergo mentoring experience higher levels of job satisfaction, self-efficacy and career growth as compared to non-mentored academics. Literature also confirms that some of the problems and intricacies that female academics encounter with regard to their career mobility are ascribed to scanty mentorship and networking in universities (Zikhali and Maphosa 2012; Shava and Ndebele 2014). The same sentiments are echoed by Brower et al. (2019) who posit that female academics tend to shy away from informal social networks leading to lack of crucial academic gurus to mentor and (Ustun and Gumuseli 2017) provide them with social support; instil confidence and career guidance to advance their career mobility.

Zikhali and Maphosa (2012) asked 31 male lecturers their views concerning their female colleagues in 3 Zimbabwean Teacher Training Colleges in Masvingo Province. It emerged that the female academics’ challenges and complexities were attributed to lack of mentorship and social networking in institutions of higher learning. This leads to the beginning of a maladaptive start in ones’ academic career. Traditionally, male academics have always had more access to influential mentors who are able to guide and shape their careers than female academics. Therefore lack of mentors (Gaidzanwa 2005; Mandoga 2017) means female academics continue to experience problems on their career development which lead to limitations towards achieving prominence in their careers. In addition, the notion that female academics need to be actively marketed and legitimised within the Universities makes it difficult for the female academics to get the necessary support required for their career development in a male dominated environment.

To circumvent the seeming challenges, Mabokela (2011), within her writings postulates

that the antidote to career growth of females as compared to male academics is that their institutions should implement formal networking, mentoring processes and training especially in the early stages of their career. Mabokela further states that senior academics who are most likely to serve as mentors will also be in a position to benefit from cross gender and cross cultural training so that they can also be effective participants in the mentoring relationship. Additionally, studies on mentoring done by Mudhovozi et al. (2013) in Zimbabwe and Ndebele et al. (2013) in South Africa had similar results. It emerged from both countries under study that mentorship for academics was crucial and departments and faculties needed to provide extensive programmes on mentoring because they enhanced the research skills of academics. Thus, concerns have been raised that though female academics do seek active, supportive and satisfying career relationships with other female academics, their efforts are met with a snub. This is despite the fact that, they (female academics) are meant to provide each other with emotional, psychological and social support about how to survive in universities that continue being infested with male dominance.

Additionally, lack of mentoring for female academics is also identified as a major cause for leaking pipeline in academia. Quinlan (1999, 2006) states that many universities are faced with the problem of supporting female academics and mentoring schemes are often proposed to improve their retention (Quinlan 1999: 32). A sense of professional identity and fitting in within the values, norms and beliefs that embrace both male and females in the university seems to be the missing puzzle. It is regrettable that the exclusion of female academics in mentoring and networking in universities is a persistent, continuous, vicious cycle. This has in the process perpetuated the values, norms, customs, traditions and negative attitudes towards female academics. It is vital that female academics are exposed to mentoring to develop their careers by getting encouragement, motivation, counselling from their mentors whether male or female. Therefore, mentoring is an essential activity and one of the strategies that can be implemented in universities to assist in curbing barriers to career development of female academics (Harris 2007).

Balancing Between Work and Family Roles

Finding an equilibrium between work and family roles has also been identified as a strategy to overcome barriers to career development of female academics. For instance, availability of support at home and out-sourced domestic roles are associated with academic career development. Erikson-Zetterquist and Styhrer (2008) advance that family, spousal support and work balance are important. Reason being, they show an achievement of role related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individuals' role and related partners in work and family spheres (Carlson et al. 2009:1459; Wang et al. 2016; Yu et al. 2017) leading to job contentment and organisational commitment. This strategy can be implemented by female academics to avoid experiencing drastic disjuncture between their professional and domestic lives (Sallee et al. 2016).

The foregoing views are supported by Morley (2014) and Mbepera (2015). These scholars advance that the underrepresentation of female academics in university as well as lack of career growth is a result of inappropriate cultural behaviours that emanate from the socialisation process within the family. Thus, it cannot be denied that the lack of aspiration for power is one of the behavioural dimensions that are rooted within the family influence (Mandoga 2017: 60). Undoubtedly, the existence of unequal structures that are visible in and out of the universities walls have played a negative role towards the critical mass of female in their career mobility (Hardy et al. 2016; Chitsamatanga et al. 2017). As such, it cannot be denied that there is a need to identify strategies that can be employed by female academics to realise career growth within the academic circles.

Statement of the Problem

The import of the study is that there continues to be a marked pyramid effect where the bulk of females are at the lower rungs of the academic ladder. This is despite the fact that countries under study are signatories for pro-women legislative frameworks that have of course cascaded to university level (Mandoga 2017; Zvobgo 2015; Morley and Crossouard

2015). Yet it appears, it is the very same universities that have not been fervent in implementing such policies which in turn may assist in identifying strategies that can be adopted. This has resulted in female academics in universities facing increasingly complex challenges due to the inherent barriers (Chitsamatanga et al. 2018). A wave of extant literature further suggests a number of possible factors which hinder the career mobility of female academics (Zinyemba 2013; Gaidzanwa and Chung 2010; Zikhali and Perumal 2014; Desselle et al 2017; Wright 2018; Turk et al. 2018; Mandoga 2017; Beech and Norris 2018). Factors such as lack of access to mentors, glass ceiling, male management norm, dearth in research publications and a balance between work and family roles as some of the challenges encountered by females in academic circles have been singled out. These factors act as barriers that inhibit female academics from realising their career growth. This explains why it is critical to identify strategies that can be implemented to enhance their career development.

Objectives of the Study

- a) To identify the strategies used by female academics in universities to overcome barriers to their career development
- b) To find out the challenges encountered by female academics in promoting their career development in universities

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach was utilised to gather extensive data with regard to strategies adopted by female academics to overcome barriers to career development. Data were collected from 20 females. A total of 5 senior female academics were purposively selected from each university for semi-structured interviews. The benchmarks for selecting the participants was based on lecturing experience (this was done by choosing participants with more than ten years in a university setup). The researchers were guided by the fact that senior female academics had been exposed to transformation and reforms such as growth in enrolments of students and academic staff; policy, leadership and management changes (Chitsamatanga et al. 2018).

In addition, 2 focus group discussions each comprising of 5 junior female academics were

conducted in each university respectively. The motivation for selecting the participants was based on the following facts. For instance, pooling in junior female academics in one group and separating them from the senior female academics would give the junior female academics the opportunity to voice out their feelings, expectations and experiences without feeling intimidated by their seniors. This the researchers envisaged would reduce biased responses. Furthermore, it was assumed that junior female academics were still novices hence, their views on the future of their careers within the universities were paramount. The instruments used to collect data were aligned with the purpose and objectives of the research. Data were analysed using thematic content analysis as supported by Rubin and Babbie (2016), Jensen et al. (2017), Schmidt and Cacace (2017), and Hoksbergen and Insch (2016) through the female academic responses in both universities. Ethical clearance was sought before the study was conducted. All issues pertaining to anonymity and confidentiality and informed consent were observed. Code names were employed and University X represented South Africa and comprised of participants P1-P5 and Focus Group 1 (FGP1). On the other hand, University Y represented Zimbabwe and had P6-P10 and Focus Group 2 (FGP2) as the participants.

There arose different themes among the participants from University X and University Y on the strategies that they had adopted. These will be discussed below.

RESULTS

Self-confidence, Commitment and Collegiality among Female Academics

Information was sought on the strategies that female academics use to help develop their careers. Some of the responses from University X participants were a bit divergent from those that were highlighted by their counterparts from University Y. Below are the strategies to overcome barriers to career development that P1 and P3 from University X spoke about. P1 said:

We need to be confident in ourselves and show commitment to our work, if we are to grow, even at societal level, we need to believe in ourselves and prove that being a working moth-

er does not mean that you cannot develop your career and look after your family as well.

P3 was also of the opinion that:

What we need is discipline and commitment. It is also about making an effort to attending the workshops and the trainings that are organised by the university on publishing and other related courses.

Some of the female academics, namely P2 from University X and P7 from University Y, felt that one of the strategies at institutional level was to have mentors and role models, P2 noted that:

I think most of the female academics have taken it upon themselves to have a role models and mentors who are not even in their institution but in the same field to guide them in their career path.

P7 reiterated:

I believe mentorship in and out of academia will help a lot so we can be aware of the opportunities that are there, seeking out some people can help you to navigate some opportunities and problems that we face.

Meanwhile P10 from university Y, also revealed that working hard at professional level surely paid dividends. She added that:

I put in extra hours every day, I remember during my book launch when my only son gave a vote of thanks he said to the guests, 'at one am you hear the alarm going off and you think the phone went off by mistake but its mama (mum) waking up', the family and friends around me said, 'what will you be doing at 1am?, are you now part of the owl family? P10 continuously posited, as you know owls are birds of the night and in the African culture they tend to be associated with those who 'work at night', because of this profession those who are not in it will not understand why you have to be up in the middle of the night and working.

On the other hand, respondents in FGP2, representing University Y, also supported the senior female academics from Universities X and Y. Their responses singled out hard work and self-confidence as strategies that could be used at professional level.

It's all about working flat out, tell yourself there are no office hours or home hours, it is about soldering on and being content with the negatives and the positives that you encounter as you try to develop your career.

The foregoing discussion with the participants revealed that self-reliance, discipline commitment, sheer hard work and role models were the key strategies adopted.

Family and Spousal Support

Family and spousal support was also identified as one strategy that female academics used at societal level to help develop their careers. In University X, Participants 2, 4, 5 were of the same opinion as P6 from University Y and FGP1 from University X. The participants were of the opinion that emotional support, constant praise, positive inter-personal relationships were vital. P2 indicated:

I believe it is important to make your family understand the type of job one has and what it entails, so at societal level asking for and getting family and spousal support is very important.

P3 articulated:

You need to let everyone at home know your goals step by step, tell them what you wish to accomplish in your career and why there is need to do that, you have to ask for their support as you may end up giving up on your goals.

In the same vein P5 echoed:

When the home front is very supportive you can reach greater heights with your career. This career requires long hours, and travelling to conferences or to do community engagement, therefore you always need people that will understand that you cannot always be there especially in all family gatherings.

Additionally, P6 from University Y, had this to say with regard to spousal support. P6 stated:

First of all although sad, the strategy that most female academics are using at societal level is that you do not bring up your own children, you employ someone to assist bringing up your kids. Family support is very important, when I had my first child I left her with my husband and mother in law to go and study abroad, what kept me going was the support I had, though what pained me most was that when I returned I was total stranger to my daughter.

Similarly, FGP1 who represented junior female academics from University X also valued family and spousal support. They added that for female academics multitasking was crucial. They added that strategies of career development were interrelated at professional and per-

sonal level and for one to develop they had to be used concurrently. FGP1 opined:

Family support is very important whether you are married or not, involve them, throw around ideas around so that they have an idea of what is expected of you at work, one has to ask for family and spousal support, these strategies are integrated because they affect both our performance at home and at work.

Interpersonal communication and psychological support within the family are seen as vital strategies in developing one's career in academia. FGP1 respondents further postulated that multitasking also helped them balance their work and other responsibilities. The following extract shows the importance of multitasking as an academic:

At work we prepare for class, we supervise, we do community engagement, mark the scripts, attend meetings and when you have a class test, you are also busy doing something else, it's about teaching yourself that every minutes counts and should be well spent, even at home while you are working on the laptop, you cook and also help the kids with homework, so multitasking at home and at work helps.

The above experts show that female academics are conscious that in addition to spousal support they have to adopt many roles at once to try and find balance between work, home and their careers. Thus endurance, determination and diligence are needed.

But, FGP2 from University Y, seemed to be a bit wary and sceptical about family support because they had negative experiences. They were open in their descriptions and said:

Support at home is important, but then on the home front distributing tasks may mean having a nanny or a relative and this has caused problem to most women. Instead of coming to help, either, they abuse the kids in our absence, they can really cause more harm than good in our marriages by taking over our homes and husbands. Some of us here already have fragile relationships with our spouses and in-laws because of the extra hours we have to work here.

The participants in the above extract disclosed the importance of hard work, confidence and self believe in developing their careers. Observations were made that there appeared to be a lot of hidden conflicts and negative tensions among some FGP2 female academics with regard to using paid domestic help as a strategy for career development. Instead, most academics in

FGP2 talked about their negative experiences and said that is why they preferred not to have any domestic help. These participants alluded to the fact that, they would rather lose out on some opportunities for career development than put their family lives at risk especially with the prevalence of HIV/AIDS because working late, travelling to conference exposed their husbands to other women. From the above, one can infer that without the psycho-social support and positive family and spousal support, female academics may find it hard to progress in their careers. The findings suggest that, the needs of the family take precedence before their careers.

Under-representation of Female Academics in Universities

The extant literature reveals that female academics continue to be under represented particularly in higher university echelons. Therefore, it also emerged from the FGP2 in University Ys' chronicles that the major constraint faced by female academics in Universities were under-representation of female academics as compared to the rest of the participants in South African and Zimbabwean Universities. FGP2 postulated that male domination intensified the plight of female academics who continued to experience pathetic leadership support from males in power. FGP2 also reflected on some of the FGP1 comments and said

We do not support each other..... we vote for male academics into positions that we know other female academics are capable of leading, being in the minority has also exposed us as being scared to lead or voice our thoughts. This is a very big institution and the population of both staff members and students is seriously male dominated so you will find that the culture of developing our careers here may seem insignificant as we do not have many active senior female academic to help us here and there.

Furthermore, the following was also highlighted by FGP2:

The fact that at the inception of this University it was strictly a science and technology University only, and most males during that era were science oriented makes male dominance here even more pronounced than other Universities. Though other faculties which are not science oriented have been included over

the past years, still lack of transparency is missing and male dominance continues to exist. We get to hear stale news most of the times and the roles and responsibilities are passed from one male academic to another..... just being excluded or not being given information on time causes slow footing and progression in our careers. Don't they say a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single foot step?, we need that footstep also as junior academics.

Lack of transparency in communication by male academics may be viewed as a way of undermining the existence of their counterparts. Moreover, the passive participation of senior female academics who are expected to act as role models and mentors seems to aggravate their under-representation. Although these concerns were raised by the majority of FGP2 respondents in University Y, one of the respondents echoed the sentiments raised in FGP1 representing university X and stated that problems being encountered had nothing to do with underrepresentation but were individually inclined. She expressed her feelings as follows:

I believe our major constraint is about lack of individual effort, once one becomes a lecturer, we tend to be too relaxed and content with where we are positioned, we do not really strive for more.... This issue of under-representation will always be there, it is a known fact in most Universities, that men surpass women.

Thus, a comparison of the responses of participants in X and Y Universities shows that it is important that female academics take control and be involved in their career development from the inception of their academic life as academicians instead of being consumers of what they found in existence.

Challenges Encountered by Female Academics in Promoting their Career Development

Regardless of the opportunities that the female academics had encountered in their Universities, the participants were asked to state what had been their biggest challenge in working as female academics in Universities. It was revealed by P1, P2 and P3 from University X that too much workload coupled with lots of administration left them with less time to do research and publications. It also emerged from the participants in University X that those female academic with leadership positions felt they did not

have enough time to execute their duties efficiently. The participants from University X qualified the scenarios as follows. P1 lamented:

It's teaching many modules, I have six modules that I take, plus supervision of postgraduates, that means as an academic you are unable to develop your career; my time is divided between lesson preparation and teaching and administration work, which I must say it's too much.

P2 confirmed what P1 said and also commented:

Publication, publication, publication.... I am sitting on a lot of data which needs to be published but because of teaching and administration it's hard to do that". P2 went on to say that: "it has become worse ever since I became deputy-dean, you see the deputy dean in this University unlike the dean, also teaches, supervises and does administration which I must say is more demanding than any other category..... at the end of the day you find yourself doing things that you are not good at "jack of all trades master of none".

Meanwhile, P8 from University Y had the same sentiments as P2 in University X and said:

The biggest challenge is research, it needs time because you can have so many ideas and even abstracts that are accepted, but getting the time to do a full paper before deadline is another story, the workload is too much.

Another senior female academic from University X, P3 concurred with P9 from University Y and described the unpleasant and inevitable situation that they are in:

There are only two permanent staff members in my department this year, I teach five courses, there is high workload and high staff turnover, mostly it is the administration and the marking part that is taxing, its hectic, time consuming, we are the biggest faculty in this University and I have about 500 students for one session of first years, 250 for 3rd years and 280 for another group 3rd year class, 20 honours students and 8 masters students..... I don't even have the me time because there is also administration to do.

Thus, shortage of staffing emerged also as a big challenge to P9 in University Y. Her views were in similar to those of P3 in University X:

The work duties here are more challenging... I am the only full time member of staff in my department and this year alone I have been called back on leave twice over which I had taken to work on my research papers and my

PhD, finding time to do research is problematic and as the literature says it's either you publish or perish, trust me I believe I am current on the latter side.

Comments from Participants 1, 2 and 3 in University X and 8 and 9 in University Y draw attention to too much teaching workload. It seems other academics have less workload load at the expense of others. P3 from University X showed the researcher hundreds of assignments on the office floor that had to be marked. These comments and the tangible evidence presented to the researcher during data collection raised concerns about lack of transparency in the sharing of modules to teach. Such a situation may impact negatively on the career development for female academics.

Further to the foregoing views, the participants in FGP1 from University X and FGP2 from University Y had similar comments. They stated how having adequate time was an intermittent but valued commodity in academia, because teaching, administration and research took all their time and this had affected their personal lives and career development. The following is an extract from FGP1:

Being an academic takes a lot of time, it's funny you know it's kind of flexible but at the same time eats away your time, there is a lot of reading to do such that if you are not careful you end up not having a social life because you just have to spend most of the time reading so that you deliver quality lessons. In some faculties we have between 120 to over 600 student for first year and third year modules and these are spread over different campuses. It is these high numbers of students that make it so difficult for some academics to make any positive development, research and supervision of learners ends up taking last precedence.

In the same vein, FGP2 from University Y, echoed the above sentiments from University X and said the high rate of student enrolment in their institution was making it hard for them to cope and to prepare fully for their lessons. In addition, the issue of having teach different modules every semester cropped up as one of the challenges for FGP2:

Having to teach a class that has so many students has proven to be difficult, you can't help but think that your own expertise is being challenged, one has to go out of their comfort zone to do their best, you will find that every-

one is overloaded one way or the other..... its hard keeping a balance (research, administration and community engagement) because there is no time to recover. Changing of modules every semester and coming up with material to teach plus the big classes lead to lessons and lecturer unpreparedness.

The above comments from the junior female academics in both universities indicate that a high enrolment of students puts too much pressure on the lecturers. It appears that the number of students is not equivalent with the employment or expansion of academic staff. The sentiments of FGP2 bring out the interconnectedness with what one respondent of FGP1 said during their interview

It is not about the modules you teach its all about the large number of learners we have in class.

Inferiority Complex and Gender Stereotyping in Universities

On the other hand, one of the common challenges among the academics in both Universities was male supremacy in Universities. In University X it was established from P3 and P4 that their biggest challenges was the inferiority complex and gender stereotyping by male academics. In University Y, P6 and P7 revealed lack of support and an elusive gender stereotyping. The extracts below are confirmation of their views. P3 articulated

The main challenge is being undermined as female academics because it crushes your spirit and demotivates you, male academics have a perception that a female cannot answer back in meetings.... I have experienced resistance stemming from ignorance which in one case it escalated to HR matters because I had aired my views which unfortunately rubbed one senior male academic the wrong way, I had to be called into a disciplinary hearing for insubordination.

As an example P4 stated:

I was harassed by a male professor because of teaching venues for a very long time.... I remember I ended up asking him if it was because I was female such that he felt he had the right to torment me and harass me in front of my students by asking me to vacate the venue that I knew he was the one who was supposed to be using.

P6 added metaphorically:

Being an H.O.D. in a male dominated field has taught me to be tough, I have had to dedicate myself 101% to achieve and conquer all my challenges... I have had to put my soul and mind in academia, I have to be on top of the situation all the times, I can't afford to lag behind for fear that my rivals have a field day and get a chance to wash my dirty linen in public.

P7 revealed:

The first time that I became an H.O.D. was in 2008. It was a very challenging time not only for the University but for the whole country because that was the time when we had a severe brain drain, I came back from leave to find that I had been appointed H.O.D. to make matters worse, the outgoing chairperson had left without showing anything to me, then the academic staff went on strike and it was during exam time..... as H.O.Ds we were not allowed to go on strike it was very challenging but I managed to pull through.

Ironically P10 from University Y felt her biggest challenge was not about administration, or research, or workload, but her relationship with the male and female academics in her department because she was not being given room to showcase her skills:

My challenge is both the male and the female academics in this department, they see me as fierce competition, as I said earlier I am a go getter and this has created a lot of tension with them..... and if I come across any challenges from any direction male or female I push them aside and forge forward.

By inference, it can be concluded that female academics continue to be subjected to open discrimination and marginalisation and they are expected to behave in a manner that continues to promote male supremacy within Universities. Linked with the foregoing findings of the paper, it may be inferred that female academics in both universities are more comfortable when teaching than doing research and community engagement. In addition, the narratives of female academics from both universities also revealed interrelatedness of barriers to career development within academia. Whereas, the strategies used to develop careers were closely linked with, working longer hours, conducive organisational culture, mentoring, staff development programmes; balancing work and family responsibilities.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that family and spousal support was crucial especially in terms of emotional support. Reason being, lack of advancement of female academics was tied to the disproportionate burden of family responsibilities, lack of family support, deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and work-life balance (Chitsamatanga et al. 2017). Research conducted by Bhana and Pillay (2012), Nguyen (2012), and Sallee et al. (2016) also points out marital status, societal beliefs and culture as hindering progress of female academics. Thus, Bhalalusesa (2010), Mabokela (2002), and Hassan (2011) reported that family variables such as moral support, work balance and parental support (Arokiasamy et al. 2011) were associated with academic career advancement. The above assertions and the findings of this study extend to previous studies done by Makombe and Geroy (2009). These scholars highlighted in their study how most female professionals in Zimbabwe in a bid to avoid being demeaned had adopted humbleness and continued execution of domestic duties as a way of gaining support and being given the green light to do their studies and pursue career mobility.

A comparison with junior academics also indicates that they reiterated that family support from partners, parents and siblings was vital. These outcomes confirm the findings from previous research by Nguyen (2012) writing within the Vietnam context. Hassan (2011) argues that spousal support is critical because the spouse is depicted as inspiring and encouraging the female academic to new achievements and professional development (Heikkien et al. 2014). Similarly, a study by Gordon and Whelan-Berry (2004) also revealed that spouses provide support by being the sounding board of the wife's ideas and providing a calming effect in times of stress. However, the findings in the study showed that female academics in University X felt getting support from spouses was hard, especially for those who worked in the same field as their husbands. Such findings are parallel with Gudhlanga et al.'s (2012) comparative study which advances that female academics continue to encounter hurdles in developing their careers because of lack of external support. These findings again support the assertions put

across by Hacifazlioglu (2010) that lack of family and spousal support is still common (Chitsamatanga et al. 2017). As a result, the study supports views of Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2009) who suggests that if spousal and family support is to be effective, it is important that the females learn to navigate their partner support.

A prevailing variable which was revealed throughout the findings of the study from both universities was that female academics lack self-esteem, confidence and commitment to their work (Mngomezulu and Maposa 2017). As a result, they tend to retain a great deal of information to themselves and do not ask what to do with it. The findings of the study lend support to studies done by Barrett (2013) and Mudhovozi et al. (2013) who state that female academics tend to adhere to societal norms and values and this affects their level of confidence, and are reluctant to come forward and parade their achievements. Zvogbo (2015) writing from a Zimbabwean perspective also advances low self confidence among women, particularly in the academic setting. This may imply that both senior and junior female academics are pessimistic about their job performances and career mobility and thus, under-estimate their capabilities within the academic circles.

Some junior and senior female academics in both universities alluded to the fact that lack of confidence and commitment was the reason why they had problems with meeting the required research outputs for promotion. Observations made in Kenya by Chisikwa (2010) and Uganda by Sperandio and Kagoda's (2009) also align with the findings of the study that most female academics have stunted career growth because they lack confidence. On the contrary Murithii et al. (2018) suggest that the predicament of female academics with regard to their career trajectory is not about lack of commitment. These scholars posit that lack of funding and areas of research that are normally valued by other academics may not align with the interest of other academics. Therefore, most female academics find themselves in a quandary because their niche areas tend to be ostracised. However Aiston (2011) argues that female academics are confident and assertive but are scared to show these attributes because they may be viewed as unruly because of displaying what society views as masculine behaviour. This means that those female academics that try and exhibit their cre-

ativeness and innovativeness within the academia to enhance their careers are viewed as unfeminine and not subservient to the status quo. As a result, those few female academics that managed to break the glass ceiling tend to be isolated in the ivory towers; male-dominated environments (Mandoga 2017).

Further, participants from both universities highlighted the importance of having a conducive organisational culture that realises the potential of all academics regardless of gender because male domination was still rampant. Gaidzanwa (2007) contextualizing the Zimbabwean situation, supports the findings of the study and is quick to say that instead of promoting gender equality and female retention through pockets of good practice, the culture in African universities is best known for perpetuating the fundamental ills of gender inequality, which are yet to be challenged and changed. Whereas, Zvogbo (2015) alludes to the fact that the main barriers to female career development are negative organizational cultures that are not gender responsive and calls out for female academics to take an active role in addressing their disadvantageous positions. In light of this, De la Rey (2017) writing within the South African context and Ndebele (2017) researching on the Zimbabwean context, posits that there is need for a paradigm shift in organizational cultures and processes that require rigorous attention which is complemented by societal shifts in gender-related expectations. Guramatunhu-Mudiwa (2015) postulates that a regression in career mobility of female leadership is because research authorities have been inaudible on how organizational culture influences career development of females within the academia. Yet, a gender responsive organizational culture in any university is a very strong variable that can be used to promote a critical mass of female academics in universities (Jisun 2015; Zayad and Aluzubi 2018).

The findings of the study showed that there was lack of guidance by senior academics who were also expected to act as role models and mentors. The results corroborate with views that it is critical that from the onset the orientation of new academics is integrated with mentoring, role modelling and networking. Moreover, such a platform can be used as a strategy to state the norms and code of practice of the institution (Abugre and Kpinpuo 2017).

Meanwhile, some of the participants highlighted that female academics were not taking advantage of the training programs offered by university to develop their careers. An implication that these staff development programmes were not being marketed in an effective manner to the female academics. Trigwell (2003) argues that for adequate professional training to be provided by universities, it is important that sufficient awareness is created right from the onset of the staff development programmes, including the approaches that are going to be used during the programmes (Chitsamatanga et al. 2018). Whereas Altbach (2011) advances that, to achieve the above mentioned, adequate and stable funding cannot be understated. But, Odhiambo (2011) state that funding in most universities in developing countries is inadequate and unreliable. On the other hand, research done by Gosling (2009) is not in support of the preceding views and suggests that the funding of academics in universities is available. However, due to the ever increasing demands economically and the student number explosions, the resources available tend to be swallowed by other unforeseen institutional needs which result in the Universities at times failing to meet the needs and demands of its academics. This will ensure that universities and the society do not see female academics as lagging behind male academics and in need of special treatment but, as individuals who are capable of coming up with various strategies at personal, societal and institutional level to overcome barriers to their career development.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the importance of family and spousal support emerged as one of the principal strategies that was adopted by senior and junior female academics in both universities. Furthermore, as shown in this paper, intermittent reaction by universities on implementing strategies such as mentoring, staff development programmes, scientific writing workshops had resulted in slow paced career trajectories for female academics in both universities. The study also found that a gender responsive organisational culture was critical in ensuring that gender parity and equal footing for both genders was promoted. This may assist in unlocking both professional and cultural beliefs that have relentlessly handicapped female academ-

ics towards their career mobility and continue to be more pronounced in universities. The study further concludes that pro-female policies that are relevant in addressing female empowerment and promoting gender equality particularly in universities have failed to live up to the expectations of promoting career growth of females. This has contributed to knowledge gaps on the narratives of females in academia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A positive gender responsive organisational culture and transformational leadership should be cultivated in both universities. This is significant in imparting self-belief among female academics so that they can aspire to reach the top echelons of university leadership, as well as realising career growth. There is a need to implement programs that talk to and meet the needs of academics particularly, females. The study further recommends that there should formalised mentoring to assist female academics to realise career development within the academia under the tutelage of senior academics regardless of gender. This may be achieved by encouraging female academics to attain PhDs and also offering them scholarships to further their studies, research funds and sabbatical leave. Social support is vital in both universities under study through community engagement. This will give the university and the surrounding communities the opportunity to reflect and challenge the sociocultural norms that promote gender inequalities in work spheres in which female academics bear the brunt. There is need to create awareness of university policies among academics through professional staff development programs. These training sessions should target in sensitizing and explaining pro-female legislative framework in both universities, what they entail, and how they can enhance career advancement for female academics. Both universities should identify pockets of good practices embedded within the global system that are relevant to the university context. These should inform institutional policies that talk to the gender agenda and be customised within the primary interventions for staff development programmes such as scientific writing to enhance research output. These should be specifically earmarked for female academics. Both universities should tap on pockets of best practices from those univer-

sities that have managed to assist their female academics realise career development through implementation of gender mainstreaming and affirmative action. This may curb the percentage of female academics leaving academia while, promoting gender equal universities that recognise the capabilities and career development of both genders.

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