



## **Female Lecturers' Initiatives in Support their Academic Career Progression. A Case of Selected Universities in Uganda**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined female lecturers' initiatives in support of their academic career progression in two universities in Uganda. It specifically focused on personal attributes which are behind actions undertaken by female academics that contribute to their academic career progression. Anchored in advocacy paradigm, this study employed a qualitative research approach and semi-structured interviews comprising of 16 female academics with more than five years at the rank of lecturer within the same university were purposively selected and used as a sample. Data were thematically analyzed and it emerged from the study that personal attributes such confidence, resilience, self-motivation determination and self-beliefs enable female academics to take initiatives such as setting realistic goals, making career decisions which enhance their academic career progression. However, these are moderated by external factors such as institutional, family and collegial support. The paper recommends that academic career progression of female lecturers should be enhanced by creating a supportive environment in which measures such as encouragement, mentoring, and ongoing training in scientific writing, adequate funding and promotion of co-authorship which stimulate female academics' individual abilities and their subsequent academic career progression are prioritized.*

**Key words:** Female academics, Initiatives, Academic career progression

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recent years have witnessed an increased number of female academic staff in universities (Moody & Toni, 2017; Parker, 2015). However, the same increase is not reflected by their numbers at senior academic ranks (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020; Tarimo & Swi, 2020). Yet, one of the major functions of universities is to boost the participation and role of females in decision making processes and knowledge generation (Morley & Lugg 2009). Regardless of the numerous years of advocacy, women's visibility in senior academic ranks and leadership positions is still low which is attributed to a number of challenges that they encounter a long their career paths (Kipsoi & Kimengi 2014). As a result, Aiston (2011) emphasizes that female academics have to be responsible for their own career growth and must learn to see them- selves as the center of their own profiles by identifying strategies that can help them to circumvent barriers to their career progression. The study on which this article is based explored support for academic career progression of female lecturers in two public universities in Uganda. The research was motivated by the slow academic career progression among female lecturers in in the country.

Historically, academia was a career path for men and even today (Odaga, 2020; Santos et al., 2021). The trend of academic career progression of female academics was and is still influenced by traditional beliefs in the different regions of the world such

preparing a woman for child bearing and family responsibilities and historical aspects in individual countries such as wars, women's movements and legislative measures (Parker, 2015). There has been an increase in the scientific study of females' career progression which have basically focused on barriers to their academic career progression and how they can be helped to circumvent those barriers (Chitsamatanga et al. 2018; Tarimo & Swai, 2020). The studies all agree with the view that female academics who are more socially and physically supported have better chances of progressing academically and ascending to senior academic ranks (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). However, the studies have scarcely looked at female lecturers' individual support initiatives as key enhancers of their academic career progression.

The aim of this article is to gain an insight into female lecturers' initiatives to support their academic career progression based on their individual abilities. It explores female lecturers' support initiatives for their academic career progression at Makerere and Kyambogo universities. Research has shown that females are miserably underrepresented in the most senior academic ranks in Makerere and Kyambogo universities (Kabonesa & Kaase-Bwanga, 2014; Lubaale, 2020). They publish less, receive less external funding, spend more time on teaching than their male colleagues, and are less likely to be promoted to senior leadership positions (Kabonesa & Kaase-Bwanga, 2014; Mulyampiti, 2016). The study was organized around three key concepts namely, female lecturers, initiatives, academic career progression. According to National Council for Higher Education (2010), 'Lecturer' is a title given to an academic staff in a higher education institution whose minimum qualification is a Master's degree. In this study, female lecturers refer to female academics involved in teaching, research and community service with a minimum qualification of a Master's degree in the case of Kyambogo University, Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the case of Makerere University and are at the academic rank of a lecturer as per the established academic positions in each of the two universities. I used this conceptualization in this study. Whereas Bhopal, (2020) described initiatives as women's ability to make decisions and take actions that lead to their career development, Obers (2014), defines initiatives as creativities by female academics based on personality traits such as self-esteem, persistence, resilience and determination which enable an individual to set realistic academic goals and also strive to achieve them, the same definition was adopted in this study. Callaghan, (2015), defined academic career progression as a process of following a linear path from entry to professorial designation level. In this study, career progression was defined as female lecturers' ability to move beyond the rank of lecturer and to excel further as a result of experience, additional training and skills especially in research work and scientific writing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical review

This research was guided by Lent, Brown and Hackett's (1994) Social Cognitive Career Theory [SCCT]. SCCT asserts that career attainment is developmental process in which individuals make a series of personal decisions shaped by social and institutional context (Lent *et al.*, 1994). SCCT proposes that interests lead individuals to pursue a particular training path and then to undertake the courses of action necessary to attain that goal. Durable career interests are thought to result from positive self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. Self-efficacy describes an individual's belief in her capacity to successfully execute the courses of action needed achieve a goal while outcome expectations refers to an individual's expected outcomes for pursuing certain courses of actions. Besides this theory recognizes the roles that individualities can play in the process of career choice and development. It was

commensurate with the study because it clearly explains how individuals can enhance their academic career progression based on their individualities.

### **Empirical review**

It is still being argued that men continue to govern, administer and manage the academic community, while women have scarcely participated in the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered. Therefore, one challenge for the woman academic identified by Acker (1983) is to utilize personal abilities to identify gaps and misrepresentations of knowledge in her field, while searching for alternative conceptualizations that confirm rather than deny the experiences and consciousness of women. Similarly, Aiston (2011) asserts that female academics have to be responsible for their own career progression and must learn to see themselves as the center of their own profiles by identifying strategies that can assist them to negotiate barriers to their career progression. Studies indicate that individuals with strong personal traits such as a strong self-esteem, persistence, resilience and determination are able to get support by forming strong relationships, participating in academic networks, soliciting for assistance from both family and colleagues (Obers, 2014; Zábrowská et al; 2018). It is established that the complex demands of the universities' work environments, such as rapidly publishing, innovative research, providing high quality teaching of large classes, combining scholarly excellence with managerial entrepreneurial skills, and family demands, can be stressful to female academics, harm their psychological wellbeing and hence, retard their career progression (Morley & Crossour, 2015; Zábrowská et al., 2018). Such a situation requires individual to be persistent, resilient, have as strong self-esteem, good time and workload management, the ability to form stable relationships, as well as the ability to develop a good network of fellow scholars and strong mentors in addition to soliciting family and collegial or social support (Obers, 2014; Zábrowská et al, 2018). For instance, Francis and Stulz, (2020) found that persistence is a virtue for women who publish and this can be a large component of the game of transitioning from rejection to publication when addressing editors' comments which requires focus on personal achievements. Similarly, Gasser and Shaffer (2014) emphasize the importance of self-belief in females' attainment of career success.

Al- Mansor et al., (2015) found that extraversion is a key driver for academic career progression, they emphasize that people with sociable and outgoing characteristics can easily get social support because they can handle social situations, as well as know how to carefully develop good relationships with significant people who are valuable to their personal development. In contrast, Gasser and Shaffer (2014) contend that persistence and self-beliefs carry more weight when it comes to soliciting social support. However, both authors do not bring out how such attributes can be utilized by female academics to enhance their academic career progression. Yet, literature indicates that social support facilitates resilience within individuals, families and communities (Dixson et al., 2016). In addition, social support involves affective social caring behavior, counselling, role modelling, encouragement, acceptance, confirmation and friendship or empowerment (Barthauer et al., 2018; Meschitti & Lawton-Smith, 2017), and it eradicates the feeling of isolation, enhances self-confidence and work engagement as well as provide a sense of security, inspiration, encouragement and affirmation to an individual which are all vital for academic career progression (Meschitti & Lawton-Smith, 2017; Martinez et al., 2015). Finally, it is emphasized that social support in the form of guidance and counselling, collaboration in research and article writing and congratulatory responses to peers who secure a senior position

motivates female academics to aspire for big achievements hence contributing to their academic career progression (Carmel & Paul, 2015; Feeney, & Collins, 2015).

Individual perceptions of ability is one of the means of fostering female agency in academia and challenging the status quo (O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015). Therefore, the emotional, academic, and professional assistance provided by friends or colleagues improves the ways in which female academics perceive their abilities, hence enabling them to undertake appropriate actions that help them in managing the demands of professional achievements (Boyland & Fisher, 2018). Studies reveal that women's agency and self-efficacy strengthen the internal dynamics in their social networks, provide role models, promotes sharing of information, creates awareness and allies, all of which help female lecturers to counter the constraints placed on them by gendered institutional cultures and practices (O'Meara, 2015; Winchester et al, 2006). On the contrary, Di-Tullio (2019) observed that there is a tendency for female academics to attribute their professional achievements to luck. Nevertheless, it is argued that, females' perspectives and self-efficacy need to be facilitated by institutional efforts to establish equity and reform which all are facilitators of career progression (Beane-Katner, 2014; O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015).

According to Hurst et al., (2017), feminism has for long hopefully believed that as women's numbers in the workforce increase, they will nurture and support each other and bring about reduced gender inequality at organizational level. This seems to suggest that female academics as colleagues need to support each other in their career journey. However, for such collaboration to bear fruits, female academics should exhibit a high sense of commitment and hard work (Aiston, 2011). Senior female academics provide support, such as friendship, feedback and emotional support to female lecturers informally as well as carry out induction of new female faculty members into academic life that basically focuses on personal development (Lloyd-Jones, 2014). But, for this to bear fruits, those supported should show willingness to be supported (Gupta, 2021; Mozerolle & Barret, 2018).

Drawing from findings of the studies by Palmer and Jones (2019), Oti (2013), social relationships help female academics to work through ongoing life balance issues and lead to the development of an intellectual and emotional closeness. This implies that woman to woman support is vital because women have more in common (Martinez, et al, 2015; Palmer & Jones, 2019). Further, it is indicated emotional and moral support from the spouse and other family members is crucial reason being, lack of academic career progression of female academics is tied to the unequal burden of family responsibilities (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020; Heikkinen et al., 2014). Nonetheless, Ezzedein and Ritchey, (2009) suggests that if spousal and family support is to be effective, it is imperative that the females learn to steer their partner support something that still points to an individual's ability to solicit and to utilize that support. Furthermore, Shavers and Moore, (2014), found that family and community support are linked to academic success. Similarly, family background was found to be equally important in influencing female academics' career progression (Vázquez-Cupeiro & Elston, 2006).

It is also established that informal groups of females create an informal space focused on gathering disciplinary knowledge and developing academic skills (Macoun & Miller, 2014; Martinez et al., 2015). Macoun and Miller (2014) further argue that female academics' peer groups enhance their disciplinary knowledge and skills, create a community of belonging, and provide a basis upon which female academics can put up resistance against the hostile institutional environments. In addition, female

academics' participation in peer groups increases their social capital (Heffernan, 2020; Oti, 2013).

The studies, however, assumed female academics' individual supports as homogenous across universities (Al- Mansor et al., 2015; Morley & Crossour, 2015; Meschitti & Lawton-Smith, 2017; Záborská et al., 2018). This not being the case, there was need to examine the individual specific factors that enhance academic career progression of female lecturers at Makerere and Kyambogo Universities. There is, hence need for the female academics to identify strategies to promote their career development at personal, societal and institutional levels.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach and a case study research design were employed. A qualitative approach provided for in-depth information about female lectures individual support measures through deeper probing (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Schools and faculties in each university were categorized into four groups according to Becher and Biglan's (1989) Typology of Disciplines. The four categories of academic disciplines are; Hard Pure [HP], Hard Applied [HA], Soft Pure [SP] and Soft Applied [SA]. From a population of 220 females at the rank of lecturer, a sample of 16 females who had spent more than five years at the rank of lecturer, two from each category were purposively selected from each of the two universities to reflect diversity across colleges and faculties. Semi structured interviews were employed as data collection techniques. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data according to instrumentations used to collect data. This involved working with the data, organizing, breaking them into manageable units, coding, synthesizing and searching for emerging patterns (Rubin & Babbie 2016). Female academics from both institutions were given identification codes to ensure anonymity during data collection and analysis. Informed consent was sought from the participants. Thus, university Mk represented Makerere University with participants MkA- MkH and University Ky represented Kyambogo University with participants KyA – KyH.

## FINDINGS

In an attempt to establish Female Lecturers' initiatives in Support their Academic Career Progression at Makerere and Kyambogo universities, a number of themes emerged from the participants' stories. These are discussed in the sections below.

### **Self-motivation and confidence**

Information was sought on the personal attributes that enable female lecturers to progress academically. From the responses given, participants seemed to demonstrate that the inner drive to achieve a target leads to goal attainment. The study revealed several personal attributes such as self- motivation, determination, self-beliefs, attitude, resilience that enable individual female academics to achieve various career targets. Most participants informed of the desire they had to attain a higher academic qualification and to publish a paper as driving force to accomplish the desired goal. From the data collected, all participants specified that one of the most important factor which helped them to embark on their PhD journey was their self-motivation and determination as MkESA explained that:

*Much as teaching was not originally my career choice, I struggled to excel and now, I like what I am doing and I try to do my level best, I enjoy reading and this has influenced my career choice. I can't divorce my work from my passion of reading. It's not that I wanted to lecture but I knew I would end up*

*in an academic environment, I had the desire to attain the top most academic qualification. I have a Post.Doc and I have so far written five papers, but I have not yet applied for a promotion because I have not yet supervised the required number of graduate students to completion*

In line with the above KyASP shared that:

*Because I had interest, I had to use my personal money to cater for study materials and part of my research work. I met several financial costs when I was doing my PhD, the funding provided by the university is never enough, somehow you find yourself using your personal money, but it not only about money, I made several sacrifices too...and that's the only way to go if you want to achieve something...in order to concentrate on my PhD studies, there are things I had to give up, I had to distance myself from most of my colleagues and relatives, and only remained in touch with those who would benefit me academically, in fact.... if I was not determined, it would not have been easy for me. Anyway, I do not want to lament about it because at the end of the day the award is mine. I am the beneficiary.*

The above responses indicate that female lecturers experience a sense of self-motivation and self-confidence as key enhancers of their academic career progression.

### **Self-beliefs**

Apart from self-motivation and determination, participants indicated that self-beliefs could limit or enhance the success with which desired career options are achieved. They acknowledged that academic career progression lies in one's ability to work hard, in the belief that yes I can, with determination to achieve the required target and experience that helps in overcoming environmental factors that may hinder ones' academic career aspirations. In this regard, KyBHP explained that:

*The belief I have in me is what propels me to go forward. I am that kind of person who is always determined to get what I want, I have always worked hard, I will not relax until I have acquired professorship. As I a child, I had some nasty experiences. I was abandoned by my father and all my siblings from my mother, that experience taught me a lesson that it is my responsibility to shape my future. It contributes to my determination to focus on the highest academic rank in academia which I know I will get, I want to forget my past.*

Additionally, some participants such as KyBHA, MkFHA and MkGSP agreed that self-beliefs energize and guide behavior towards reaching a particular goal in life as MkFHA intimated that:

*I am working hard to get the required number of post graduate students supervised to completion so that I can apply for a promotion to Senior Lecturer because that is the only requirement, I still need in order to qualify for a promotion. I know I will achieve my target; I have always put-up resistance against failure.*

Some participants seemed to believe that it is their character that enabled them to acquire friends, solicit for assistance which has all enabled them to move forward in their careers. For instance, participant MkFHA shared that:

*I have an extrovert personality at work, I easily make friends. This has helped to easily access resources. For example, if I fail to access an article, I can easily ask the librarian to help me, I have always asked colleagues in the department to read through my papers, when I go for conferences, I easily connect with colleagues which has widened my academic network, I have co-authored papers, all this is vital for my academic career progression.*

The abovementioned discussion with the participants revealed that character influences the kind of initiatives that female academics undertake for their academic career progression.

### **Ability to utilize family**

The data illuminated participants' capability to utilize personal traits to elicit support from family members and relatives as vital for their academic career progression. Among the family members and relatives identified parents came out prominently followed by spouses, siblings, in-laws and children respectively. Participants agreed that family help took more than just the child care route because it involved other supports such as funding, counselling and some would even provide technical support such reading through manuscripts. They shared that their family support enabled them to balance family and academic demands in that the family members compensated for their absence. Either the spouses or other relatives would take over their share of housework as they (participants) concentrated on their academic work as alluded to by MkFHA that:

*When I decided to undertake a PhD course, my mother tried to sweet talk me into changing my mind but I had already made up my mind. On realizing that I could not change my mind, she became very supportive. She supported me socially emotionally and physically. If you do not have strong social support while doing a PhD, most especially within your home country, life becomes so difficult. You have to get somebody to carry some of the load for you. For instance, I had to give up my motherhood role, that is why my mother came home and took care of my children including taking them to school every morning, but it was not so easy. It was my decisiveness which convinced my mother to help me.*

Some of the participants were able to solicit tangible support from family members such as funding from their spouses especially in terms of tuition fees as shared by MkBHP that:

*After he had observed me grapple with funding my studies, my husband decided to give me a push by paying tuition fees to undertake a Post Graduate Diploma in Education, he bought for me laptop. Being in the same academic field, sometimes he would help me to mark students' assignments. It is the seriousness you to attainment of your target that will convince others to help you.*

Similarly, KyEHA was able to lobby financial assistance from her husband despite the fact that she devoted much time to studies instead of her family which seemed not to go well with her husband. Other participants said they received counseling and encouragement from family members during PhD candidature which enabled them to persist throughout their studies but this came only after they taken the first step as shared by MkESA that:

*When I decided to enroll for a PhD, my family has been very supportive especially my mother, brothers and sisters. They have been there for me, I remember when I was doing my PhD, sometimes I would feel like not going to the lab for my research work but they would encourage me not to give up.*

Meanwhile KyCSP was inspired by her children who kept on nagging her to complete her Doctoral studies. She shared that:

*My daughters really gave me emotional support, sometimes my first girl would refuse to go to bed, and she would sit and wait for me at night while I was analyzing my data. Her two siblings used to ask for my report from the school where I was studying. That always encouraged me to go on, I did not want to disappoint them, so I had to make sure that I take that report to them and that was my PhD certificate.*

The findings indicate that the assistance from relatives was provided after an individual had shown interest in undertaking an academic venture which further emphasizes the importance of self-motivation.

Furthermore, the findings clearly indicated that background and the likely support to access higher education, enter the academic profession and subsequent academic career progression are connected. Participants acknowledged that home background can enhance or constrain one's academic career progression because it shapes one's future aspirations. KyBHP revealed that she is what she is today because of the experiences she went through as a child. She narrated that:

*We were born four children by my mother in a polygamous family of nineteen children. My mother was the second wife. When my father got another wife, he practically ignored us and my mother because my mother was from a poor family. The situation forced my mother to work hard so that she could earn a living in order to meet our basic needs and even send us to school. She used to encourage us to work hard at school and to disapprove our father that we shall never be failures in life. So, it is that early childhood experience that motivates me to be a hard worker and also to try to excel in whatever I do.*

In the same vein, MkGSP whose mother was a primary school teacher had a desire to join a university when she was still a child which she managed to achieve though it was not through a linear path. She attributed this to her mother's profession as a teacher. She chronicled her experience that:

*I was not fortunate to go to university straight because by that time the only University was Makerere, so due to the high competition I missed just by one point. I cried and cried, but my mother who was a primary school teacher encouraged me. She told me that "Do not worry, you will go to the university and that is where I would like you to work." So, I joined Kyambogo University for a Diploma in Education after which I joined Makerere University through a Mature Age Entry scheme. Indeed, I remained there until I was appointed an academic staff, so thanks go to my mother who was a simple primary school teacher.*

Basing on findings above, it is clear that support from relatives, the ambition level and the degree of persistence make a big contribution towards academic career progression of female lecturers.

### **Ability to solicit collegial support**

The findings of this study revealed that ability to solicit support from colleagues or lack of it has an impact on an individual's academic career progression. Study participants identified the helpful actions of friends as enhancers of their (participants) academic career progression. Such actions include; getting information, assistance with tasks, and emotional support. Recurring in the accounts given by participants was that individual female lecturers enjoy collegial support as a precursor to the enrollment for a PhD program. For instance, KyGHP who had already completed her PhD, partially attributed her success to her ability to establish strong relations with colleagues in the department who used to give her encouragement to enroll and the Head of Department who allowed her to fix her teaching time table based on her convenience so that she would get time for her studies since she pursued a taught PhD. KyASP, MkCSP, MkESA and MkFHA touched on the very important part of collegial support, which is assistance provided in academic writing, as participant MkFHA in this study alluded:

*I have been able to team up with colleagues and I have co-authored papers, you know, when you are still fresh on this journey of authorship, you come across so many humps on the road which an experienced driver can help you navigate until when you are able to drive on your own, without having to depend on a navigator all through.*



Relatedly, MkESA asserted that:

*It is so helpful to befriend and to learn from such experienced and obviously successful faculty members because academic writing can cause hiccups. It's good to know that you can be good at teaching and good at research too. You don't have to sacrifice one for the other. I think the professors with whom I have coauthored papers have helped me to balance this.*

While other participants, appreciated encouragement they got from their colleagues at times when they felt like giving up on their studies. In her words, KyEHA who was still pursuing PhD shared that that:

*I make sure that I connect with colleagues who can support me, we share and discuss a number of issues concerning my work, and I get encouragement from colleagues never to throw the towel, most especially, when books get so tough.*

Meanwhile, MkbHP and MkGSP partly attributed the achievements each of them has so far achieved to their ability to solicit help and encouragement received from senior academics to which they agreed that when people in senior academic ranks give encouragement and other supportive practices toward female lecturers, it can positively influence their academic career progression as MkGSP shared that:

*I befriended a Professor who showed great concern for me. One day, he asked me why I had not yet gone for a PhD, then I explained to him that we were few in the department and my going away would leave a gap. Then he responded to me that "You are not immortal, if you died today we shall replace you by another academic staff in the department, so better go back to study." On his advice, I packed my bags and left because already I had got a scholarship, but I was hesitant to leave the people I love behind. His words are still ringing in my ears up to today. He was such a good motivation.*

The quotes above illustrate that the women have the capacity establish relationships with colleagues which can enhance their academic career progression. This implies that women should get more involved in such beneficial relations.

Whereas some participants got advice and encouragement from friends and colleagues, others got physical assistance. For instance, Participant MKAHP had her daughter taken to school every day by friend so that she could go to the office very early to use the internet because by then the band width was still low. Participants KyGHP and MkhSA had their workload shared by their colleagues to enable them to have more time to concentrate on their PhD work. In a nutshell, support from colleagues is vital for female lecturers' academic career progression because it enables them to overcome obstacles along the career journey.

However, it was established that not all female academics exhibited a positive attitude towards career progression. Some agreed that they were lazy to write, others seemed to be contended with the rank at which they are while others said that they are demotivated by inadequate training and role models. This could have contributed to participants' different perspective with regards to their academic career progression. As such, Participants MkGSP shared that:

*I have a PhD, I have teaching experience of more than ten years in a university and I am currently an acting head of department. One of my biggest challenges is that I am lazy to write. Yet one of the key promotion requirements is the number of publications one has. And now that I have a lot of work in this office, writing will remain a big challenge to me.*

Similarly, KyASA who had finished her PhD in the last seven years regarded her achievements are enormous. However, she became exhausted by all the struggles of

earlier years and professes a lack of interest in the high academic hierarchies in the university. In the same vein, participant KyCSP felt that at her current academic rank, she had already achieved much and was contented with her achievements. Meanwhile some participants reflected lack of confidence and commitment. Below are the views of participant KyHSA

*I am gripped by panic whenever I think of having to write and produce a paper, it is affecting my upward career movement. I am aware that the university emphasizes research because it increases its rankings among other universities. But I feel that I can't produce a standard paper. Sometimes I wonder whether It is me who is not serious and committed; big teaching workloads will always be there, I just have to be committed and confident that I can publish, I think I am just nervous to try.*

Relating to the above aspects, it can be deduced that female academics are equally in charge of their academic career progression. However, for it to be successful, there should be conditions that stimulate individuals' personality traits such as early mentoring, assistance from family and colleagues. These are key in boosting self-esteem, self-efficacy, confidence and determination.

## DISCUSSION

The study revealed that female lecturers support initiatives are crucial for their academic career progression. Reason being, lack of progression of female academics was partly tied to individualities such as low self-motivation, lack of self-beliefs which are attributed to the disproportionate burden of family responsibilities, lack of family support, deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and work-life balance (Chitsamatanga et al., 2018). Social cognitive theory which claims that individuals are active agents in their environment emphasizes the role of specific person mechanisms in influencing an individual's interventions that would lead to goal attainment ((Lent et al., 1994). O'Meara, (2015), suggest that intervention is expressed through perspectives and actions which agree with this study's findings. The perspective comprises taking deliberate views on human experiences in ways that promote an individual goals and agentic actions. These entail an individual's ability to assert her free will to influence her own life career path through calculated steps (Terosky et al., 2014). Draru (2017) emphasizes that individual women's intervention is very important in their academic career progression because it enables them to maneuver around constraints in order to climb the academic ladder. Similarly, this study found that individual attributes such as; self-motivation, self-beliefs, resilience, a sense of humor, determination, confidence, independence and a high level commitment are influencers of participants' sense of intervention which enable them to form ideas which are relevant to their academic goals. From the developed ideas, actions which are in line with their academic career goals are formed and undertaken which concurs with O'Meara, (2015) that women's intervention play a critical role in sustaining, retaining and advancing female academics in institutional systems which is in agreement with this study's findings.

The findings of the study revealed that female academics exhibited high levels of self-determination and the self-confidence to push themselves forward in their education endeavors. It was evident in those female lecturers who decide to undertake PhD studies backed up their ambition with intellectual ability and academic excellence, both of which won for them respect not only in the families but also in educational institutions all of which is a reflection of the effectiveness of the females initiatives. In support, KyUB explained that "though I am a brilliant woman, I have always worked

hard. That is why I have been winning scholarships right from primary school up to university level.” The finding refutes the view by Mngomezulu and Maposa (2017), that female academics lack self-esteem, confidence and commitment to their goals.

The study findings further revealed that participants utilize their individual abilities to get support from outside the university environment. This plays a crucial role in easing the attainment of academic achievements (Carmel & Paul, 2015). In order to be able to manage and focus on their academic careers, the participants discussed the importance of acquiring support of family members and friends to help them do this. The support provided by family is in the form of funding, encouragement, taking care of children and emotional help. The findings align with what previous studies have suggested that support received by female academics from spouses, family, and sometimes extended family is vital when it comes to making professional decisions such as pursuing further studies (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020; Meschitti & Lawton-Smith, 2017; Martinez et al., 2015). The study findings indicated that the role of the family is vital when it comes to building and maintaining resilience which concurs with Chitsamatanga et al., 2018; Chitsamatanga and Rembe, 2020) that family and spousal support is crucial especially in terms of emotional support because lack of advancement of female academics is tied to the unequal burden of family responsibilities. The study findings also concur with Bhalalusesa (2010), Hassan (2011) who reported that family variables such as moral support, work balance, spousal and parental support are associated with academic career advancement. Along similar lines, Hassan (2011) and Heikkien et al., (2014) agree that spousal support is critical because the spouse is depicted as inspiring and encouraging the female academic to new achievements and professional development. Similarly, Nguyen, (2012) 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 to get support from family depends on how well the concerned female academic plays her cards.

The findings also revealed that ability to get collegial support of form of guidance and counselling, collaboration in research and article writing and congratulatory responses to peers who secure a senior position or who get their PhD awards (or lack thereof) is influential in accelerating or decelerating the career progression of female lecturers. This is more effective where woman to woman support goes on in universities because women have more in common and such relationships help especially early career female faculty to work through on going life balance issues (Palmer & Jones’s, 2019). It is further established that senior female faculty provide support to their juniors in the form of assigning challenging tasks, facilitating access to academic networks, resources and further job opportunities (Oti, 2013). However, this contradicted with my findings because majority of the participants indicated that they had hardly been supported by fellow women colleagues in their career journey and as such, they did not attach much importance to female collegial support. This could probably be attributed to Derks et al., (2015), O’Neil et al., (2018), observations that much as women may desire and expect support from each other, the gender inequities perpetuated by institutions norms and cultures which force would be models to adapt masculine tendencies may interfere with the successful attainment of those needs.

Literature gives numerous benefits of collegial support groups to female academics (Martinez, et al., 2015; Macoun & Miller, 2014). However, the study findings established that such collegial groups are scarce in the two universities which could negatively impact on female lecturers’ intellectual collaboration. This situation was observed by Martinez, et al (2015) that creating collaborative relationships among female faculty who share similar traits and experiences leads to the development of an

intellectual and emotional closeness. Similarly, collaborative research and writing groups among female faculty can contribute to mentorship when a more experienced faculty works with and guides a less experienced faculty with professional nurturance (Martinez, et al., 2015). Nevertheless, for that kind of support to bear fruits, women faculty should exhibit a high sense of commitment and hard work (Penny et al., 2015). This suggests that women themselves should be at the forefront of supporting their career progression before looking at external actors.

On the other hand, the study found that female lecturers' initiatives are influenced by the university environment which sometimes constrains their self-motivation and beliefs depending on the manner in which each university handles and supports academic career progression of its female academics. This was emphasized by KyUD that *"I have found the process of chasing a scholarship from the university extremely stressful, to which I have to conclude that the manner in which university scholarships are awarded is not transparent."* Similarly, Draru, (2017) observed that funding which is gender neutral is open to competition by both females and males, but where the criteria for getting the funding is not clear, it causes suspicion. Nevertheless, under a supportive environment, female lecturers are able to exercise agency, to be able to circumvent hurdles in their career path and negotiate their way to academic career progression (Draru, 2017). Therefore, the reality of the situation emphasizes the fact that female lecturers agency along the educational career path can be constrained or enhanced by personal attributes.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the study's findings, I conclude that; female lecturers possess attributes such as resilience, perseverance, self-motivation, determination, and self-beliefs which influence their ability to make career decisions and to take actions that enhance their academic career progression. The personality traits influence how individuals approach not only the tasks they are faced with but the obstacles that exist on their career journey.

Personal beliefs about one's own career aspirations and ability to identify career opportunities all demonstrated female lecturers' self-drive which enable them to reach out and utilize opportunities in family, workplace and spousal relations to enhance their academic career progression.

The constraining work experiences of the women influence the patterns of the education pathway of the female lecturers in my study. In particular, the little priority given to supporting academic career progression of female academics demotivated some of the women and obliged them to give up. Those women who dared to pursue their career progression did so out of defiance against the odds rather than pure career interest or choice.

A supportive work environment was also found to be critical for academic career progression of female academics because it ensures that gender parity and equal footing for both genders is promoted. This may assist in stimulating women's desire for knowledge production and unlocking both professional and cultural beliefs that have persistently handicapped female academics towards their career mobility and continue to be more pronounced in universities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Universities should develop effective and efficient professional networks and mentoring relationships at an early stage by attaching early career female academics to

senior academics. This will boost female lecturers' self-esteem and beliefs, create awareness of university policies among female academics and all the promotional requirements.

Female academics should be in charge of their academic career progression and should take the first step towards it. They should mobilize themselves and form peer groups such as writing groups in which they can write papers, learn from each other and also look for easily accessible publishing outlets with support from each other.

Where senior female academics are few, a member with strong mentoring skills can work with a group of female lecturers, this should be on a self-help basis. Female lecturers should also equip themselves with the right characteristics such as setting realistic goals, making effective career decisions to be able to seize most of the opportunities provided by the university system and, at the same time, strategize their career progress with positive career-enhancing schemes.

Female lecturers should strive to join male academics' networks, they need to work together and share academic insights. By penetrating males' network, female lecturers will get to know what males say and do in their network. This will consequently stimulate female them to search for and support fellow females in their academic aspirations.

### **Areas for further research**

As this study was conducted in two public universities, it would be valuable to explore whether female lecturers in other universities have similar or different experiences as regards individual support. Therefore, the scope of the study can be extended to generate further empirical insights through a comparative analysis by including more universities.

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