



Institutional and Individual Support as Determinants of Academic Career Progression among Female Lecturers in Selected Public Universities in Uganda

Phoebe Nabawanuka¹ Eric Douglas Kalanda² Berna Lutaaya³

^{1,2}School of Education, Kyambogo University

³School of Education, Kampala International University

Email: dkalanda@kyu.ac.ug

Abstract: *Female lecturers in public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) experience slow academic career progression. This qualitative study therefore explored the institutional and individual support that facilitates their advancement. Guided by the objective of examining how such support enables career progression, the study was anchored in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and informed by liberal feminist philosophy. A multiple case study design was adopted, with the two universities purposively selected. Participants were drawn from different academic disciplines categorized using Becher and Biglan's typology, with two female lecturers selected from each category, making a total of 16 participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and complemented by document analysis, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that Institutional and individual support were found to help female lecturers set realistic career goals, make informed career decisions, and reduce work-related stress, thereby enhancing their academic progression. The study recommends that university support systems should be bottom-up, gender-responsive, and context-specific. It also emphasizes the importance of early mentoring by senior faculty, the formation of peer support groups among female academics, and the strengthening and effective implementation of existing institutional support mechanisms.*

Keywords: *Institutional and Individual Support; Career Progression; Female lecturers; public universities; Higher Education Institutions; academic progression*

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1. Introduction

Universities play a vital role in knowledge production and societal transformation, yet gender disparities in academic career progression persist. Despite increased participation of women in academia globally and in Sub-Saharan Africa, their representation in senior academic ranks remains disproportionately low. An advocacy worldview situates these disparities within broader structures of inequality, emphasizing the need to address systemic barriers and

promote gender equity in higher education. Academic career progression is influenced by both institutional and individual factors. Institutional support, such as mentorship, access to research funding, professional development opportunities, and gender-responsive promotion policies, are essential for advancement. However, many universities operate within gender-neutral frameworks that often overlook the specific constraints faced by female lecturers, including disproportionate caregiving responsibilities and limited access to professional networks. From an advocacy perspective,

these challenges are structural requiring deliberate institutional transformation.

Although individual factors such as resilience, motivation, and strategic engagement are important, they are insufficient in the absence of supportive institutional environments. In Uganda, disparities in career progression persist despite increased female participation in academia. This study therefore examines how institutional and individual support jointly determine academic career progression among female lecturers at Omega and Beta Universities to inform more equitable policies and practices.

1.1 Research Question

This study was guided by one research question; In what ways do institutional and individual support mechanisms shape the academic career progression of female lecturers in public Universities in Uganda?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was anchored in Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown, and Gail Hackett (1994). This was selected as appropriate theory conceptualizes career attainment as a developmental process in which individuals make a series of decisions influenced by both personal attributes and the surrounding social and institutional context. According to SCCT, individuals' interests guide them toward particular training pathways and motivate them to take actions necessary to achieve their career goals. These sustained interests are shaped by self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. Self-efficacy is therefore an individual's confidence in her ability to successfully perform actions required to achieve desired goals, while outcome expectations relate to the anticipated consequences of engaging in those actions. The theory also emphasizes the role of individual characteristics in shaping career choices and development. SCCT was therefore appropriate for this study, as it provides a clear framework for understanding how personal attributes interact with contextual factors to influence academic career progression.

2.2 Empirical Review

Support is widely recognized as a pivotal driver of positive change (Barthauer et al., 2018). Nonetheless, existing

scholarship underscores that support mechanisms aimed at advancing the academic careers of female academics must operate in a complementary and integrated manner to yield meaningful outcomes (Aiston et al., 2020; Mulyampiti, 2016). This body of work implies that isolated interventions are insufficient to address the inherently complex and multidimensional processes underpinning academic advancement. Within this discourse, mentoring is consistently identified as a central mechanism of support, given its role in facilitating the articulation of realistic career trajectories and enhancing prospects for professional mobility (Chitsamatanga et al., 2018; Meschitti & Lawton-Smith, 2017). However, despite its prominence, the efficacy of mentoring remains subject to critical debate. Some studies challenge its direct contribution to the career progression of female academics (Carmel & Paul, 2015; Graham, 2019), contending that its impact is contingent upon its structure, form, and modes of implementation.

In particular, informal mentoring characterized by flexibility and mentee-driven selection has been widely regarded as more effective than formalized arrangements, largely because it fosters deeper, more reciprocal, and potentially transformative relationships (Boating, 2018; Morton & Gil, 2019; Palmer & Jones, 2019). However, literature pays comparatively limited attention to the role of institutional actors in shaping enabling environments for mentoring, a gap that is critical given that institutional conditions may significantly mediate both the accessibility and effectiveness of mentoring practices.

Scholars further contend that mentoring programmes achieve optimal effectiveness when they are contextually grounded, reflecting the distinctive organizational, cultural, and structural dynamics of specific institutional environments (Knipfer et al., 2017). However, a critical strand of literature problematizes the substantive value of some mentoring initiatives, characterizing them as largely symbolic interventions that signal institutional commitment without delivering tangible outcomes (Chitsamatanga et al., 2018; Mulyampiti, 2016). Moreover, mentoring remains an inherently contested and loosely conceptualized construct, with limited consensus on what constitutes effective practice (Meschitti & Lawton-Smith, 2017; Osezua, 2016). This conceptual ambiguity is compounded by issues of accessibility, as mentoring support is not always available at critical junctures in academic career development (Ashencaen & Shiel, 2019). Gendered dynamics further complicate these processes, as reflected in notions such as "playing mother," which illustrate how mentoring relationships can inadvertently reproduce gendered expectations and channel women's career trajectories within academia.

In practice, mentoring provision is frequently insufficiently differentiated to address individual needs (Blood et al., 2012), while prevailing models often place the onus on mentees to actively seek support. This expectation can constrain access to tacit institutional knowledge, which is typically embedded within informal networks (Denard-Thomas et al., 2015). Structural limitations are also evident in the underrepresentation of senior female academics available to serve as mentors, thereby restricting opportunities for meaningful and relatable mentorship among early-career women (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2019; Mulyampiti, 2016). Despite these constraints, mentoring continues to be recognized as a significant mechanism for nurturing academic potential and facilitating career progression (Anderson, 2005; Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2019). The coexistence of these enabling and constraining dimensions points to the need for more nuanced and context-sensitive empirical investigations to better understand how mentoring can be effectively designed and implemented.

Social networks are widely acknowledged as integral to academic career progression, primarily due to their role in facilitating access to information, fostering collaboration, and enabling entry into professional opportunities (Davis & Warfield, 2011; Kegen, 2015; Macoun & Miller, 2014). However, a substantial body of literature highlights persistent gender disparities in both access to and participation within these networks (Kegen, 2015; Rani-Thanacoody et al., 2006), raising critical questions about their inclusivity and equitable functioning. Although networks are often framed as valuable reservoirs of social capital, emerging evidence suggests that they may yield comparatively fewer tangible benefits for women (Kholis, 2017; Denard-Thomas et al., 2015). This uneven distribution of benefits can be attributed to intersecting structural and socio-cultural constraints, including time limitations associated with gendered roles such as caregiving, restricted access to resources, and the tendency toward homophily within professional networks (Gibson et al., 2014; Kegen, 2015). Consequently, women's networks are frequently smaller and less resource-rich, particularly during their reproductive years, and their participation in networking activities especially those occurring beyond formal working hours may be significantly constrained (Surangi, 2014; Gibson et al., 2014). These limitations suggest that reduced engagement in networks can curtail access to critical opportunities for career advancement. Moreover, participation in networks, in and of itself, does not automatically translate into professional gains; rather, its effectiveness is contingent upon alignment with individuals' career stages, goals, and specific needs (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2019). In addition, variations in network structure and content play a decisive role in shaping outcomes (Šadl, 2009; Heffernan, 2021), underscoring the importance of interrogating how

networks are constituted and operate within particular institutional contexts.

Institutional policies constitute a critical mechanism for supporting academic career progression, as they provide formal frameworks that shape access to research funding, regulate workload distribution, and promote family support provisions (Boushey et al., 2013). Despite their strategic importance, their effectiveness is frequently constrained in practice. A growing body of literature critiques such policies as largely symbolic or inadequately implemented, often due to limited institutional capacity or insufficient understanding of how they should be operationalized (Bhopal, 2020; Timmers et al., 2010). Furthermore, the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms contributes to a persistent disconnect between policy intent and actual practice (Timmers et al., 2010).

In addition, the availability and impact of family-friendly policies remain uneven across institutions. Even where such provisions exist, their translation into meaningful career advancement for female academics is not guaranteed (Smith & Waltman, 2006; Stromquist, 2019). This suggests that formal policy presence alone is insufficient without supportive institutional cultures and effective implementation strategies. Similarly, affirmative action policies continue to generate ambivalent responses. While designed to address structural inequalities, they are sometimes criticized for inadvertently reinforcing perceptions of reduced competence among beneficiaries (Aiston et al., 2020; Chitsamatanga et al., 2020), thereby undermining their intended outcomes. Notwithstanding these limitations, there is evidence to suggest that well-designed, context-sensitive, and gender-responsive institutional policies can play a significant role in improving women's representation in senior academic positions (Bhopal, 2020; Parker et al., 2018). Their effectiveness, however, appears to be contingent upon their integration with other complementary support mechanisms, highlighting the importance of a holistic and coordinated approach (Bhopal, 2020; Parker et al., 2018).

Research funding constitutes a central determinant of academic career progression, as it underpins both knowledge production and institutional prestige. High-performing universities are typically distinguished by their access to substantial research funding (Heffernan, 2018; Jacob & Lefgren, 2011), while the ability to secure such funding is widely interpreted as a proxy for academic productivity and competence, key criteria in promotion processes (Sato et al., 2021). Despite its importance, access to research funding remains unevenly distributed along gender lines. Empirical evidence consistently indicates that female academics receive fewer research grants than their male counterparts (Jung, 2020), pointing to systemic

inequities within funding regimes. These disparities are often attributed to biases embedded in the evaluation of research proposals (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020; Sato et al., 2021), as well as structural variations in funding allocation across institutions and disciplinary fields (Heffernan, 2018).

The implications of such disparities are far-reaching. Limited access to funding constrains research productivity, particularly in terms of publication output, which remains a central metric for academic advancement. Consequently, female academics may experience restricted progression to senior academic ranks (Morley, 2014; Obers, 2014). Furthermore, the highly competitive nature of research funding intensifies these challenges, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities and further marginalizing women within academia (Subbaye & Dhunpath, 2016). Taken together, these dynamics underscore the need for a more critical interrogation of how funding mechanisms are structured and operationalized, particularly in relation to their role in shaping equitable career advancement trajectories.

Finally, although female academics are frequently expected to provide mutual support and solidarity (Hurst et al., 2017), empirical evidence highlights the persistence of the “queen bee” phenomenon, whereby some senior women assume gatekeeping roles that may limit the advancement of junior colleagues (Derks et al., 2016; O'Neil et al., 2018). This pattern is often interpreted as a response to the pressures of navigating male-dominated institutional environments, within which women in leadership positions may feel compelled to assimilate prevailing norms and distance themselves from other women to maintain legitimacy (Hurst et al., 2017). Such dynamics suggest that entrenched institutional cultures can actively undermine collective support and cohesion among female academics.

More broadly, while the literature identifies a range of institutional and individual support mechanisms, there remains limited conceptual and empirical clarity regarding how these factors concretely enable or constrain academic career progression among female lecturers (Kapur, 2019). In addition, the field is characterized by ongoing debates and inconsistencies concerning the effectiveness of these support systems (Aiston et al., 2020; Bhopal, 2020; Chitsamatanga et al., 2020; Jung, 2020), reflecting the complexity and context-specific nature of academic career trajectories. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address these gaps by critically examining how institutional and individual support mechanisms interact to shape the career progression of female lecturers.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach, employing a multiple case study design to generate in-depth insights into the institutional and individual support mechanisms that facilitate the academic career progression of female lecturers. The multiple case study design was deemed appropriate as it enabled a detailed exploration of the phenomenon across two universities while incorporating multiple data collection methods. The study population comprised female academics at the rank of lecturer drawn from various colleges and faculties within the two universities. Institutional records indicated approximately 143 female lecturers in one selected university and 77 in another, yielding an estimated total population of 220 female lecturers. From this population, a purposive sample of 16 female lecturers was selected. Participants were selected based on academic discipline, guided by the typology developed by Tony Becher and Anthony Biglan (1989), which classifies disciplines into hard pure, hard applied, soft pure, and soft applied categories. Two participants from each category were selected from each university, resulting in eight participants per institution. All participants had served at the lecturer rank for a minimum of five years, a duration considered sufficient for eligibility for promotion according to institutional human resource policies.

The study employed both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling facilitated the identification of information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into the phenomenon, while snowball sampling enabled the recruitment of additional participants with relevant experiences through referrals from initial informants. Data were collected using semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Follow-up focused interviews were conducted. Document analysis was used to corroborate interview data and provide contextual information. The documents such as gender policies, strategic plans, human resource manuals, appointment and promotion policies, and minutes of appointments and promotions committee meetings from both universities.

3.1 Ethical Consideration

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. Participants were provided with detailed information regarding the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. They were required to sign a consent form indicating their voluntary agreement to participate. It was clearly communicated that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly

maintained throughout the research process. Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms, and no identifying information was included in the research report. This was particularly important given the relatively small and identifiable academic communities within the selected universities.

To ensure privacy, data were collected in settings that allowed participants to express their views freely without fear of being overheard or identified. Interviews were conducted in neutral and secure environments convenient for the participants. All research data, including audio recordings and transcripts, were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. The principle of non-maleficence was upheld by minimizing any potential harm to participants. Given the sensitivity of issues related to gender and career progression, care was taken to avoid causing psychological discomfort or professional risk. Participants were treated with respect, and cultural sensitivity was observed throughout the study. The researcher ensured honesty and transparency in data analysis and reporting. Findings were presented accurately without fabrication or misrepresentation, and all sources were appropriately acknowledged to avoid plagiarism.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are organized into four interrelated themes: reduced anxiety, enhanced networking capacity, informed career decision-making, and acquisition of skills. Across these themes, participants consistently emphasized the value of both institutional and individual forms of support in shaping their academic career trajectories.

4.1 Reduced Anxiety

Participants described reduced anxiety as the alleviation of financial, psychological, and time-related pressures that would otherwise undermine their academic focus and productivity. For many, financial support, particularly scholarships, were central to this experience. As one participant noted:

"After getting a scholarship, the pressure of looking for tuition eased and I was able to concentrate on my studies. I am now at the stage of data analysis and I am confident that I will submit my book soon" (KyEHA).

Similarly, another participant highlighted the psychological stability that accompanies financial security: *"When your study requirements are financially catered for, there is a way it makes you psychologically settled and then you divert all the attention to accomplishing your studies"* (MkDHA).

Study leave also emerged as a critical enabler of reduced anxiety. Participants who were granted time away from work responsibilities emphasized its importance in facilitating timely completion of their studies and enhancing scholarly productivity. As MkCSP explained:

"I was given a study leave, which greatly helped me to do my research... when you are given time off work and go away from the pressures of the work environment, you can really concentrate... like writing manuscripts, which add value to your academic weight."

In addition, emotional and collegial support from family members and peers played a significant role in easing stress and sustaining motivation. One participant reflected on the supportive departmental environment: *"So, you feel as if you have a small family in the department... somehow it makes you good"* (KyFHA). Overall, the findings suggest that reduced anxiety achieved through financial, institutional, and social support enhances focus, well-being, and academic progression among female lecturers.

4.2 Ability to Network

Networking was widely perceived as a critical resource for academic growth and career advancement. Participants defined networking as the ability to build and sustain professional relationships through interactions at conferences, workshops, and within academic and social spaces. Many participants highlighted how networks facilitated access to opportunities, mentorship, and collaborative work. For example:

"The social network support you get through friends, colleagues, supervisors is very important... my supervisor made sure I get all fellowships around. It helped me to establish links with other academics in my discipline... I still have most of those connections up to today" (MkGSP).

Others described how international and inter-institutional collaborations strengthened their academic profiles. KyBHP, for instance, engaged with scholars from other universities to co-author papers and develop grant proposals, thereby expanding her academic reach. However, not all participants benefited equally from networking opportunities. Some expressed reluctance to engage due to issues of trust and personality. As KyASP explained: *"I am a private person... I have seen so much backstabbing that I am reluctant to share and trust people."* This divergence underscores that while networking is widely recognized as valuable, individual dispositions and past experiences may shape engagement with academic networks.

4.3 Career Decision-Making

Participants conceptualized career decisions as choices that directly influence their academic progression, including pursuing doctoral studies, publishing, and seeking promotion. These decisions were shaped by a combination of personal background, motivation, and the availability of support. Family influence emerged as a strong determinant. One participant reflected: *“My mother... used to encourage me to aspire for bigger things in life... there was no doubt that I would get educated and also aspire to become a professor”* (KyBHP).

Institutional support, particularly access to scholarships, also informed critical career decisions. As MkdHA stated: *“I decided to enrol for a PhD... after getting assurance that I would get a scholarship from the university.”*

At the same time, personal attitudes and work ethics influenced decision-making. Some participants acknowledged limited scholarly output due to competing responsibilities or lack of motivation: *“I am still at Lecturer level because I have not written much... writing takes a lot of time”* (MkGSP). Others demonstrated strong agency and commitment, even in the face of personal sacrifice: *“In order to finish my PhD in three years, I had to distance myself from my family... you have to accept that you’re going to be working in the evenings and weekends”* (MkdHA).

Despite these individual efforts, participants critiqued institutional support systems as largely generic and insufficiently responsive to gender-specific needs. As one participant observed: *“Nothing special has been done for me as a female... whatever kind of support I have received is within the university’s policy guidelines which are not cognizant of the female unique circumstances”* (KyASP). Concerns were also raised about bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of transparency in support mechanisms, particularly regarding promotions: *“The multi-prolonged promotion process can really put you off... sometimes you feel like giving up”* (MkCSP).

Overall, the findings indicate that career decision-making is shaped by an interplay of personal resilience, socialization, and structural conditions, including the accessibility and implementation of institutional support.

4.4 Acquisition of Skills

The acquisition of academic and professional skills emerged as a key outcome of support initiatives such as training, mentorship, and graduate studies. Participants emphasized the importance of these opportunities in

enhancing research capacity, academic writing, and career advancement. Training programs, particularly those tailored for females, were reported to be transformative. As MKAHP noted: *“The female-only training I attended made me realize the importance of setting personal goals... it was an eye opener.”*

Postgraduate experiences, especially international exposure, also contributed significantly to skill development: *“One of the great experiences... was the opportunity to attend doctoral seminars... they improved my content knowledge”* (MkdHA).

Workshops and seminars further enhanced awareness of shared challenges and coping strategies among female academics: *“Listening to their experiences... was very helpful and encouraging. It was a very good learning platform”* (KyCSP).

Mentorship and role modelling were also highlighted as critical for skill acquisition and professional growth. One participant reflected: *“Learning on the job... develops a woman’s social skills... to assert influence, negotiate better and gain more confidence”* (MkAHA).

Participants unanimously agreed that academic success requires not only qualifications but also the effective utilisation of acquired knowledge: *“Having a good qualification is important, but the knowledge acquired should be utilized to write papers, win grants, make networks and change the community”* (MkFHA).

Taken together, the findings reveal that institutional and individual support mechanisms play a pivotal role in reducing anxiety, fostering networks, shaping career decisions, and enhancing skills among female academics. However, gaps remain in the design and implementation of support systems, particularly in addressing gender-specific challenges and ensuring equitable access to opportunities.

4.6 Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the dynamic interplay between institutional support mechanisms and individual attributes in shaping the academic career progression and identity of female academics. This aligns with existing scholarship which posits that both structural and personal factors jointly influence women’s advancement in academia (Barnes et al., 2021; Hlengwa, 2019). Evidence from the two universities suggests the presence of some support measures, reflecting a moderately supportive institutional culture. However, consistent with prior studies (Mulhall, 2014; Obers, 2014), the effectiveness of these measures appears contingent not only on their availability but also on individuals’ capacity to utilize them. A

supportive institutional environment was found to facilitate the alignment of personal career aspirations with professional development opportunities. Participants indicated that available support motivated them to make career decisions consistent with their interests, thereby reinforcing findings by Barnes et al. (2021) and Francis and Stulz (2020), who argue that institutional cultures that prioritize the visibility of women at senior academic levels positively influence their progression. This also resonates with Social Cognitive Career Theory, which suggests that supportive environments enhance the translation of interests into goals and actionable career choices. These insights point to the need for institutions to cultivate environments that actively enable female academics to realize their potential.

Financial support emerged as a particularly significant motivator for engaging in research and advancing academically. Participants emphasized that such support reduces stress and creates a conducive environment for scholarly productivity. This finding is consistent with literature highlighting the importance of institutional cultures that are responsive to women's needs in reducing work-related stress and fostering academic development (Kossek et al., 2017; Lesenyehyo et al., 2018; Mashile et al., 2021). In addition, the study confirms the critical role of mentoring, networking, and induction processes in shaping academic identity and career trajectories. These elements can either enable or constrain career progression depending on how they are structured and accessed (Bilijohn et al., 2024). The findings therefore suggest the need for more personalized and context-sensitive professional support systems, as recommended by Billot and King (2017), alongside continuous monitoring of their effectiveness.

Despite these positive aspects, the study revealed notable dissatisfaction with the institutional culture, particularly its limited emphasis on gender-responsive support. The absence of clear policies on flexible working arrangements and family-supportive facilities, such as childcare services, was identified as a constraint. While literature suggests that flexibility can reduce stress and improve work-life balance (Atiku & Ganiyu, 2022; Rafnsdóttir & Heijstra, 2013), participants in this study reported a lack of structured provisions in this regard, potentially hindering their career progression. Furthermore, participants expressed reservations about affirmative action policies, particularly in relation to promotion criteria. As one participant asserted: *"I do not support these things like they should reduce the number of publications required for us women to become professors... we have to meet the actual requirements because we do not want men to say that women are favoured"* (MkFHA). This perspective reflects a preference for merit-based advancement and echoes findings in the literature (Aiston et al., 2020; Doherty &

Manfredi, 2010). It also highlights how affirmative action may be perceived as reinforcing stereotypes of female inferiority rather than as a mechanism for addressing structural inequalities (Akala, 2019; Molla & Cuthbert, 2014). Document analysis further revealed limited gender-specific support provisions, suggesting a continued institutional gap in addressing the unique challenges faced by female academics.

The study also points to weak networking structures within the institutions. While networks are recognized in the literature as vital for sharing resources, fostering collaboration, and enhancing academic visibility (Barnes et al., 2021; Stromquist, 2015; Wanigasekara, 2016), many participants reported limited access to or engagement with such networks. Although some benefited from collaborative relationships, others remained isolated, struggling to establish professional connections and gain recognition. This uneven access to networks underscores the need for deliberate institutional efforts to strengthen collaborative cultures. Concerns were also raised regarding the implementation of support measures. Participants reported instances of perceived inequities in the allocation of scholarships and research grants, suggesting the presence of covert discrimination. Such challenges, as noted in the literature (Aiston et al., 2020; Obers, 2014), can undermine academic progression, particularly in areas requiring research output and publication (Mokhele, 2013; Sadiq et al., 2019). These findings highlight the importance of transparent and equitable processes in the provision of academic support.

At the individual level, the study emphasized the importance of personal agency in career progression. Attributes such as goal-setting, determination, resilience, and proactive networking were identified as critical enablers of success. While institutional frameworks are important, participants demonstrated that individual initiative often serves as the starting point for career advancement. This somewhat contrasts with literature that emphasizes institutional guidance through mentoring and coaching (Manfredi, 2017), suggesting instead a more agentic role for female academics in navigating their career paths.

The findings also revealed that failure to fully utilize available opportunities, such as research grants, can hinder career progression. However, this should not be interpreted solely as individual inability. Rather, structural and contextual constraints including competing responsibilities and limited access play a significant role (Aiston et al., 2020; Morley, 2014). While some scholars attribute this to lower career motivation among women (Faniko, Ellemers & Derks, 2022), the present study suggests a more nuanced explanation. The highly competitive nature of

opportunities, often favoring men, indicates the need for targeted interventions, such as women-focused grant schemes, to enhance equitable participation (Bourguignon et al., 2020).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the academic career progression of female lecturers is shaped by a complex and reciprocal interaction between institutional support structures and individual agency. Evidence from Makerere University and Kyambogo University indicates that while existing support mechanisms such as financial assistance, training opportunities, and mentoring contribute positively to career advancement, their impact is moderated by the extent to which they are accessible, effectively implemented, and responsive to gender-specific needs. The findings highlight four critical pathways through which support influences career progression: reduction of anxiety, enhancement of networking capacity, facilitation of career decision-making, and acquisition of relevant academic skills. These pathways not only enable female lecturers to navigate institutional demands but also strengthen their academic identity and visibility. However, the study also reveals persistent structural and procedural constraints, including weak networking systems, limited gender-responsive policies, and perceived inequities in access to opportunities, which continue to hinder optimal progression.

5.2 Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. For support mechanisms to be effective, both the manner and the level of commitment with which they are implemented are critical. Institutional declarations of support must be matched by consistent and meaningful practice. Such alignment would enable the provision of context-specific support that responds to the diverse needs and career stages of female academics. Consequently, greater emphasis should be placed on raising awareness and strengthening support systems for female lecturers across all career levels. Furthermore, to enhance the impact of existing support measures, institutions should streamline and expedite promotion processes without compromising quality. A more efficient and transparent system would serve as a strong motivator, encouraging female lecturers to actively pursue

promotion by assuring them that their efforts will be recognized in a timely manner.

2. Finally, efforts to promote the academic career progression of female lecturers should extend beyond institutional frameworks to consider broader socio-cultural and contextual factors. Addressing non-institutional barriers that constrain women's advancement is essential for achieving more comprehensive and sustainable outcomes.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

Examining the perspectives of male academics and university leaders could yield a more comprehensive understanding of institutional dynamics and help inform the development of more inclusive support strategies. In addition, future research could adopt a comparative approach across multiple universities within Uganda to analyze how differences in institutional cultures and policy frameworks shape the academic career progression of female academics.

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