CONSTRAINTS AND CONTRIBUTORS IN ADVANCING BLACK WOMEN ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS AT A UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This article draws from a project that was conducted at a South African university to investigate the advancement of Black women academic researchers. A qualitative research method was used to obtain rich data from Black women academics. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings from the study suggest that the constraints in advancing Black women academics were: research was not a priority; problems with work-life balance; research challenges; a male-dominated environment; time constraints; lack of support; and funding. The contributors in advancing Black women academic researchers were perseverance, collaboration, co-supervision, motivation, mentorship and support, including institutional support. There ought to be a deeper inquiry into how best to ensure the advancement of Black women academics at universities in South Africa.
Key words: constraints, contributors, Black women academics, university, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Transformation, race and equity are all loaded terms which are increasingly part of the higher education narrative in South Africa and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future (Breetzke and Hedding 2018). Across the higher education sector worldwide and in South Africa women academics have been experiencing an array of challenges in advancing their careers (Barret and Barret 2011; Ceci and Williams 2011), such as gaining access to higher education spaces (Ramohai and Marumo 2016). Entry into academia has been slow, linked to the ideology that men are better suited than women for academia (Ramphele 2008). With the introduction of legislative prescripts such as the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998,

institutions were required to advance women in the workplace. Despite the enactment of this piece of legislation as well as other legislative interventions related to affirmative action and equity, the universities have not achieved a large of cohort of women advanced in academia, as reflected in Table 1. Moreover, Morley (2005) argues that even though institutions are showing progress in the advancement of women, the same cannot be said for the development of these same women: there are no growth strategies to prepare the women to occupy senior positions. Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard (2015) point out that while Black women PhD graduates increased with 960 per cent from 1996 to 2012, none of these encouraging trends have resulted in increased demographic representation in the HEIs in the country. Black women PhD holders are still faced with the challenge of advancement within universities and Phakeng (2015) insists that the Black women academic cohort has been marginalised by the "masculinity of power" visible in HEIs. This essentially means that the transformation of HEIs is lagging and that the advancement of Black women remains a fallacy. This study contributes to addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 5 (gender equality). Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world (United Nations 2020). Historically, it is notable that women have been underrepresented in leadership positions in South African higher education institutions for some time regardless of race (Kele and Pietersen 2015). In a similar vein, Ramnund-Mansingh and Seedat-Khan (2020) explain that despite the promulgation of legislation in relation to equity and gender development within higher education, Black women academics continue to face challenges based on racial and gender disparities.

The retention of Black women academics remains a challenge for research-intensive institutions of higher education, primarily due to culture and climate issues (Howard-Baptiste and Harris 2014). Johnson and Thomas (2012) contend that higher education is considered to be one of the few sectors committed to embracing both fairness and equity in common practices, though for academia in the new landscape the cultivating of a diverse talent base, more especially involving women academics, remains a concern. Black academics experience challenges such as a lack of support from both institutional policies and, at times, senior management, which does not provide the necessary leadership and individualised assistance. These factors impede the success and advancement of Black women academics (Davis and Brown 2017) and require investigation if Black women academics are to be retained. It is also important that higher education institutions address the challenges that burden Black women academics (Fields 2020). This article aims to contribute to helping Black women academics become researchers in higher education. The purpose of this study is to explore the constraints and contributors in advancing Black women academic researchers in a South African context with specific reference to a university in South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The underrepresentation of women is a worldwide legacy characterised by bias and unequal opportunities (Ceci and Williams 2011). The study of women in academia has attracted attention for some time, hence both private and public institutions have focused on the advancement of women in the workplace. Work-life balance is regarded as a "person's tendency to retain a clear demarcation and allocation of right proportion of time to the various demands of the personal and professional lives, subsequently leading towards the equilibrium in life" (Grzywacz and Carlson 2007). In universities, women have been underrepresented regardless of their race and universities have not achieved large numbers of women academics irrespective of prescripts related to employment equity or equal opportunities practices.

In the context of the university under investigation, the statistics are still worrisome, as reflected in the Table 1.

Table 1: Number of members of staff per ethnic group and gender

Campus grouping	Women					Men					Total
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total	
E Campus	6			6	**12**	27			6	33	**45**
G Campus	13			4	**17**	24			3	27	**44**
M Campus	5			11	**16**	12			3	15	**31**
P Campus	12		1	4	**17**	18				18	**35**
PW campus	311	9	14	177	**511**	427	6	14	164	612	**1123**
S campus	97	1	1	22	**121**	173	2	4	22	201	**322**
Total	**444**	**10**	**16**	**224**	**694**	**681**	**8**	**18**	**198**	**906**	**1600**

Source: http://pta-hedamis2-p/ReportServer/TUT/Reports/MIS/Staff/Staff Overview/SSRECF: (Accessed June 2021)

Table 1 shows that the instructional/research professionals of the university are dominated by African men (42.56%) and women (27.75%). These figures are in line with the university's transformation initiatives. The rest of the staff are represented as follows: White women (14%) and White men (12.37%); Indian women (1%) and Indian men (1.12%); and Coloured women (0.62%) and Coloured men (0.5%). Notably, overall the instructional/research professionals are dominated by Africans with 70.31 per cent, followed by Whites (26.37%); Coloureds and Indians account for 3.32 per cent. These statistics confirm that women are still underrepresented in the higher education sector and if appointed, they occupy junior positions (Maphalala and Mpofu 2017, 15). This underrepresentation is attributable to patriarchal practices besetting higher education, particularly in South Africa (Maphalala and Mpofu 2017). In regard to the profile of the women academics in relation to the women in academia, PhD holders and NRF

rated, the picture is still very bleak characterised by a total of 694 female academics and 906 males. Of the 64 females, 160 are PhD holders and 13 are NRF rated.

The lack of women representation emanates from different sources; for instance, many women have too many commitments, which include caring for children and performing household chores, outside work (Dorenkamp and Ruhle 2019). All these activities are time-consuming and could limit women's ability to apply the necessary focus to their academic work to build their careers, unlike their male counterparts (Mokhele 2013, 611). Similarly, Boateng (2018) found that issues such as women's roles as caretakers of children and keepers of homes keep many Ghanaian women from pursuing a career or progressing in their respective careers. These multiple roles should be taken into account in terms of the workload allocated to women academics by universities. Another dimension, particularly in a South African context, is that White women were privileged during the apartheid era prior to 1994 and took precedence over Black women (Mokhele 2013). As a result of this discrimination, Black women remained underrepresented and may still suffer from the effects of previous disparities (Naicker 2013). Black women academics find it difficult to strike a balance between family life and the demanding academic life (Mahabeer, Nzimande, and Shoba 2018) and therefore experience time constraints in fulfilling their obligations as academics.

In this study, feminist thought was used as an appropriate framework for exploring the experiences of Black women academics, since it would allow the Black women academics to share their experiences of their challenges in career progression. With feminist thought, the focus is on fostering both Black women's empowerment and conditions of social justice (Mokhele 2013). Collins (2000) believes that this theory stems from the need to make the lives of Black women visible, to tell their stories from their point of view and in their own words and to work on their own for justice and empowerment. According to Collins (2000), the four dimensions underpinning Black feminist thought are (i) "Lived experience as criteria of meaning", which refers to knowledge Black women have amassed as a result of their life experiences; (ii) "The use of dialogue", which suggests that a talk between two persons is fundamental in solving oppressive and contentious issues, therefore collaborative talks are pertinent; (iii) "The ethic of caring", which is fundamental to the Black feminist and implies talking with heart and having appropriate emotions that show belief in the validity of the argument; and (iv) "The ethic of personal accountability", which requires being accountable for personal knowledge claims. Furthermore, knowledge claims made by individuals respected for the moral and ethical dimensions to their ideas would weigh more than those offered by less respected figures. This means that when individuals put forth knowledge claims, that should be based on integrity and sound ethical values. This study is underpinned by Black feminist

thought as a theoretical lens through which the experiences of Black women academics who took part in the study are viewed.

Constraints in advancing Black women academics

Monnapula-Mapesela (2017) found constraints in the advancement of Black women academics. These constraints were resistance, disadvantage, oppression, psychological pressure and scrutiny, bullying and segregation. More training in postgraduate supervision and article writing is necessary to ensure that research is seen as a priority in the South African higher education context (Nkumane 2018). Sonn (2016) concurs that development is needed in postgraduate supervision.

Kachchaf et al. (2015) as well as Alleman et al. (2018) are of the opinion that work-life balance is a significant issue for women of colour in academia. Msimanga (2016, abstract) states: "the complex relationship of time, career and context, I argue that the time of womanhood, blackness and motherhood in academia is out of joint". Black women academics experience research challenges such as having the necessary discussion forums and resources (Walkington 2017). In the research area challenges concern the supervision of postgraduate students and writing of articles for publication (Nkumane 2018).

Walkington (2017) and Alexander-Floyd (2015) found that a male-dominated environment inhibited the growth of Black women academics. Similarly, Nkumane (2018) found that a large number of departments had no women and that the faculty was still largely male-dominated, even in the subjects that attracted women students. This finding is not surprising, as Table 1 demonstrated that instructional/research professionals were dominated by males – thus the challenge for universities to advance women in academia. Various aspects constrain the performance and productivity of Black academics in universities. This is characterised by the attainment of a postgraduate qualification, more especially a PhD, which is a milestone in commanding one's academic path (Maphalala and Mpofu 2017). It has been noted that most of the South African women obtained their doctoral degrees at a later stage than men; they also completed their PhDs whilst their children were still young. In this instance balancing the professional obligations and domestic responsibilities were more of an issue. In addition, Black women academics still face high teaching workloads; all of these impede their research momentum post-PhD (Maphalala and Mpofu 2017).

In the academic fraternity, there is a lack of support for mentorship required specifically for the emerging cohort of Black female academics (Chitsamatanga, Rembe, and Shumba 2018). This is evident from the skewed representation in universities where males dominate most of the senior academic positions. Nkumane (2018) found that there was a need for

programmes to cater for academic researchers over 50 years of age in South African higher education. Overall, a lack of support, particularly for women, is prevalent in the universities and it is prudent to address this imbalance to ensure that women academics are advanced (Chitsamatanga et al. 2018). Studies have shown that funding is seen as a challenge for the progression of the Black women academics. For instance, Shober (2014) argues that the lack of funding impedes the advancement of Black women academics and derails their academic progress. In South Africa funding agencies like the National Research Foundation (NRF) have funded programmes to advance women (Thuthuka programme). Yet despite the available opportunities women still face some hurdles in getting their grants approved. Notably, male academics are doing much better than their female counterparts.

According to DHET (2020), accessing research funding constitutes a significant challenge for many academics. There are a few funding opportunities that specifically target Black academics or academics in HDIs, particularly Black women. Academics who are knowledgeable about the opportunities and proactively put themselves forward appear to be able to take advantage of these opportunities. Notably, many academics report difficulties in obtaining funding, possibly because of a lack of transparency in funding opportunities, lack of knowledge about funding opportunities and lack of expertise to access funding opportunities (Ramnund-Mansingh and Khan 2020).

Contributors in advancing Black women academics

Monnapula-Mapesela (2017) found that Black women academic researchers persevered and improved themselves through professional development and taking ownership of their career advancement. Madileng (2014) states that as a Black woman academic it is important to pursue one's goal of proving one's capabilities as a woman and as a professional. Nkumane (2018, 121) found that Black women academic researchers should "collaborate with other academics and be strategic and think out of the box in order to achieve their goals". Van der Wal, Thorgood and Horrocks (2020) argue that efforts to encourage women researchers will assist in closing the gender gap in academia.

A number of initiatives have been implemented to build capacity in universities (Kasprowicz et al. 2020). These are characterised by co-supervision and delegation of responsibilities, such as attending meetings. Notably, universities should allow female academics who are busy with their doctoral degrees to co-supervise postgraduate students. This is done to capacitate the novice female academic to supervise postgraduate students as soon as she has completed her PhD qualification. Co-supervision is a means to capacitate women, particularly women academics who are committed to their career paths, to establish a critical

mass of supervisors (Thanacoody et al. 2006).

Motivation is a prerequisite for women academics who want to advance their careers. Research has shown that there is still gender inequality in academia (Mahapatra 2018). To reduce the disparities and empower women it is vital to engage women in the economic activities of the universities. In this regard, motivation plays a key role. Mahapatra (2018) defines motivation as an internal drive that activates behaviour and gives it direction. Motivation is concerned with the process that describes why and how human behaviour is activated and directed. Importantly, motivation enables individuals to pursue work they perceive to be fundamental and compels them to accomplish their goals.

Singleton (2021) highlights the importance of supporting Black women's careers by using proper mentorship. Maphalala and Mpofu (2017) found that higher education institutions in South Africa should offer mentorship programmes to facilitate women's contributions to research. The main reason for this is that academia has been a male environment for centuries; which has led to women being underrepresented in the academic fraternity, especially at the professorial level. Mentoring therefore can serve as a pathway to professional development to ensure a smooth career progression for women (Meschitti and Smith 2017). That said, the academic profession is marked with specificities that might challenge the development and uptake of mentoring (Meschitti and Smith 2017). It bears mentioning that academics have a balance of responsibilities that is much broader and more complex than that of other professions and comprises research, teaching and community engagement. Essentially, academics are required to fulfil all these key aspects of academia. Mentorship may hold positive possibilities whilst simultaneously presenting barriers (Chitsamatanga et al. 2018). One of the barriers is the lower status and profile of women academics, necessitating the alignment of personal factors to ensure a good match (Cross et al. 2019). Another pertinent factor that inhibits mentoring is that women often find it difficult and time-consuming to identify a suitable mentor with similar interests.

Universities have ample support for academics, particularly for emerging researchers, through the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG). The grant is intended to allow academics to improve their qualifications, especially at doctoral level (DHET 2020). In this regard, the academics are afforded workload relief, either partially or in full. Furthermore, emerging researchers who have recently completed their doctoral qualifications are assisted to enhance their research profile and supervisory skills by attending training interventions. These are funded through the UCDG. But in this case, workload may present an obstacle, specifically heavy administrative and teaching workloads, especially for younger staff who carry much of the responsibility for undergraduate teaching. Lack of funding, under-preparedness for research

and a non-supportive research environment are other important barriers.

In advancing Black women academics, universities have introduced a number of development programmes or interventions (Bell et al. 2020). A typical intervention is that of the emerging researcher which is aimed at advancing people who were previously disadvantaged due to race and gender. In this regard, mentors are vital for the career progression of women in academia (Boateng 2018). What is more, social networks, particularly academic associations, play an important role. Academic associations offer opportunities for collaborating on research projects of common interest. This type of collaboration might be useful for emerging Black women academics as they are likely to benefit from the experience of collaborators (Boateng 2018).

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH PURPOSE

The university under study has an existing database of all permanently employed researchers at the university. According to the 2015 Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) data, at that point women instructional and research staff constituted 43 per cent of all professional staff at TUT. Recent bibliometric analyses (2018) revealed that women researchers contributed on average only 24 per cent of overall research publication outputs. This is a concern that requires urgent attention. Researchers have identified a plethora of barriers associated with the advancement of women academics, for instance, inadequate networks, mentors and role models; work and family imbalances; and gender power imbalances (Thanacoody et al. 2006). Literature argues that the HE system in South Africa is still marred by obvious contradictions and discrepancies regarding the quality of transformation and achievement of equity targets, particularly for qualified Black academics and women in management positions (Boughey and McKenna 2015). It is notable that these barriers are systematically increasing with no progress made in the quest to advance and support these Black women academics. All these impediments stifle the career progression of academics. The proposed partnership with the National Research Foundation (NRF) is therefore aimed at increasing the contribution of women staff to this university's research production. In 2019, about 565 of this university's staff held doctoral qualifications. Of these, 204 were women, constituting 36 per cent of all doctoral degree holders at TUT. Of the 204 women, about 94 were African – 46 per cent of women researchers at this university. The constraints and contributors to advancing Black women academics are not clear.

The two-fold purpose of the study on which this article report was first, to investigate the constraints to advancing Black women academic researchers and secondly, to investigate the contributors to advancing Black women academics at a South African university. It bears

mentioning that TUT had 40 NRF Rated Researchers in 2019, of whom only five were Black women. This is just about 12 per cent of the total number of rated researchers that were at TUT in 2019.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology was used in this research. Flick (2009, 472) describes qualitative research as research that is interested in analysing the personal meaning or the social construction of issues, events or practices through the collecting of non-standardised data and the analysis of text and images rather than numbers and statistics.

Research design

An exploratory research approach was followed in line with Burns and Grove (2001, 374), who describe the purpose of exploratory research as gaining new insights, discovering new ideas and increasing knowledge of the phenomenon. According to Polit, Beck and Hungler (2001, 19), explorative research is undertaken when a new area is being explored or when little is known about an area of interest.

This research adopted a constructive interpretive approach, which comprised the specific field experiences, perceptions, views and evidence as well as the multiple realities of Black women academics concerning the need to advance their academic careers. Givens and Jefferies (2003) argue that the "Afrocentric feminist methodology has the potential to validate the experiences, dialogical knowledge, caring and accountability that may be present within Black women academic philosophy".

Participants

The following inclusion criteria were used to select 50 participants for this study:

* The National Research Foundation (NRF) Thuthuka list from 2013–2020, to ensure that current grant holders were not included in this project.
* Women academic staff members who had already obtained their doctoral degree or would obtain their doctoral degree during 2020.
* Women who were either Black, Coloured or Indian.

Data collection

An email interview guide was used as a data collection technique. The following open-ended questions were posed:

- Tell me about your experiences as a women researcher at this university.

- Elaborate on the constraints that you experienced in advancing into a researcher at this university.

- In your opinion, what do you think contributed to your advancing into a researcher at this university?

- How can this university assist you to become an NRF-rated researcher?

This interview guide was sent to each of the 50 identified Black women academics individually. Out of the 50 invitations, 15 women volunteered to participate in this study. Saturation of data was taken into consideration during data collection.

Data analysis

Tesch's (1990, 142–145) method of thematic analysis was applied in this study to analyse the data collected by way of email interviews. Data were manually coded and categorised and themes were developed. Deductive coding derived from relevant theory was used. During data analysis other themes and categories surfaced and inductive coding was therefore also used. This type of analysis is aimed at identifying commonalities in the themes that emerge from the interviews (Rankhumise and Rugimbana 2012). After the data analysis had been completed, the researchers met to discuss the analysis and agree on the specific significant emerging themes as presented in the discussion section.

Trustworthiness of the data

Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013, 236) state that trustworthiness involves the following elements: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Credibility was established through peer debriefing and member checks (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 301–316). The study used a transparent account of manual coding, together with a systematic, comprehensive and exhaustive audit trail of the analysis of data, to ensure that the research process followed was logical, traceable and clearly documented to ensure dependability (Sinkovics and Alfoldi 2012, 818). Zhang and Wildemuth (2009, 314) state that confirmability is determined by checking the internal consistency of the research product. In the present research, this was done by checking the data, the findings, the interpretations and the recommendations. Transferability was provided by obtaining data sets and descriptions that were rich enough for other researchers to make judgements about the findings and transferability in different settings or contexts, as suggested by Elo et al. (2014, 2).

Ethical issues

This project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Tshwane University of

Technology.

FINDINGS

As the purpose of this study was two-fold, the first was to investigate the constraints to advancing Black women academic researchers and the following themes that emerged from the analysis depicted in Table 2 and the second purpose is reflected in Table 3.

Table 2: Constraints in advancing Black women academics

Themes	Verbatim
Workload	"My current workload is structured in such a way that it is impossible to do any other thing." Participant 1 "My workload does not take into account research activities and community engagement, which means less emphasis are put on research as a result one has to make his or her own plans to accommodate research and community engagement in his/her work schedule." Participant 14
Research is not priority	"Research is never prioritised as compared to teaching especially at departmental level." Participant 2 "Lack of initiatives / intervention from the institution to support emerging researcher." Participant 14
Work-life balance	"As a mother, widow and student, it was not easy for me to do all this responsibilities." Participant 3 "Various Responsibilities and Multi-Faceted Role as a woman – various responsibilities as a women leader, mother, (even granny), Acting Head of XXX in the past PLUS various other work responsibilities and researcher." Participant 5
Early and late research challenges	"Age marred my progress to an extent in the sense that some organisations have an age limit for applicants. This in turn retards supervisory progress as some B Tech students struggle to get funding for their projects and unfortunately I have not been able to help them." Participant 4 "There are no clear expectations for a newly graduated doctoral student who is permanently employed by the institution." Participant 15
Male-dominated environment	"Traditional thinking that males are better at research than women is still common, even though there is no research to support this idea." Participant 11 "In xxx like most of academic institutions research is male-dominated field hence a high number of women refrain from research because it is time-consuming and grants are competitive based on already existing research publications." Participant 15
Time- constraints	"Most of senior researchers/potential mentors are too busy with their work and have little time for junior researchers." Participant 11 "Institutional support programmes such as supervision workshops are often carried out during class times so it is often difficult for lecturers to attend." Participant 15
Lack of support	"Lack of statistical support for research at this university." Participant 11 "The postgraduate programme manager who was a representative from departmental level attended faculty meetings and did not share or disseminate information. Everything that I have learned about research is self-taught." Participant 6
Funding challenges	"Even though research grants were available to everyone, as a young researcher it was a struggle to complete the grant application forms. I tried to apply for the Thuthuka grant twice to enable me to support students whom I was supervising and I was unsuccessful. I had many students whom I supervised and needed financial support." Participant 13 "Funding remains a major challenge due to the following reasons: very competitive, limited only to advanced researchers, lack of training in grant application for up-coming researchers." Participant 15

It is clear from the extracts above that workload, the fact that research is not a priority, work-life balance, research challenges, a male-dominated environment, limited time and lack of support and funding were constraints for the participants.

As previously indicated above that the study had two-fold purposes, the second, is to investigate the contributors to advancing Black women academics at a South African university. It is imperative to understand the contributors to the advancement of Black women academics in their careers. The perceived contributors are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Contributors in advancing Black women academics

Themes	Verbatim
Perseverance	"Is either I sacrifice the time for teaching and allow student to work on their own, for me to have time to do the research work. I can't get it right but I am determined to forge ahead no matter what it takes." Participant 2
	"Persevering – always persevering irrespective of the circumstances." Participant 5
Collaboration	"I associated myself with people who encouraged me and mentored me with regard to publishing papers." Participant 3
	"I have learnt that I cannot work in silos, collaboration is key to engage on multi-disciplinary projects. I have supervised students from other disciplines." Participant 13
Co-supervision	"I co-supervised with people who helped me a lot." Participant 3
	"I am involved in postgraduate co-supervision and this is an opportunity for me learn and grow as a researcher." Participant 10
Motivation	"Motivation was the key factor. All forms of support would be futile if the enthusiasm is not maintained." Participant 4
	"Personal motivation primarily contributed to my growth. Given the working conditions, it's either you push yourself or give in to the pressure." Participant 10
Mentorship and support	"Support and mentorship from assistant dean research, head of department and postgraduate programme manager." Participant 6
	"My colleagues and HoDs provided the backbone for my progress. Their mentorship and support was fundamental to me securing funding and allowing me the time to complete my higher degree studies." Participant 12
Institutional support	"Availability of facilities (laboratories, chairs, centres etc.) and additional resources from collaborators. I received financial support (qualification completion grant) from Research and Innovation Directorate office." Participant 13
	"Hence, the institutional initiative to provide lecturers with sabbatical leave has proven to be beneficial and contributed to my success in research." Participant 15

From the above quotes, it is clear that perseverance, collaboration, co-supervision, motivation, mentorship and support – including institutional support – were contributing factors to assist Black women academics to advance their careers.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the constraints and contributors to advancing Black women academic researchers at a Southern African university. These constraints and contributors are discussed below.

The findings of this study that related to the constraints were as follows: research is not a priority, problems with work-life balance, research challenges, a male-dominated environment, time constraints, lack of support and funding. The findings were in line with those of Nkumane (2018) and Sonn (2016), namely that research not being a priority, can be a constraint. The assertion could be a result that they do not have knowledge and capabilities in research and as such, they see themselves as just lecturers focusing on teaching. Perhaps more training interventions such as postgraduate supervision and article writing are important to ensure that research is seen as a priority in the South African higher education context (Nkumane 2018). Over and above training, it is important for them to be mentored by the experienced researchers and by so doing their self-efficacy will be enhanced. Sonn (2016) concurs that development is needed in postgraduate supervision. Kachchaf et al. (2015) as well as Alleman et al. (2018) also found that work-life balance was a challenge for Black women in academia. It is important to note that the Black women academics are not just focusing on academic matters obligations, but they do have domestic activities that they still need to carry out when they are at home. These domestic duties further hamper some of the academic matters that might be done at home and as such, there is no proper work-life balance achieved. Black women academics experienced research challenges such as having the necessary discussion forums and resources (Walkington 2017); supervising postgraduate students; and writing articles for publication (Nkumane 2018). Walkington (2017) also found that a male-dominated environment inhibited the growth of Black women academics. According to Maseti (2018), the burden of constantly needing to prove one's worth and intellectual capability becomes an artificial barrier to advancement. Besides having domestic responsibilities, Black women academics have high teaching workloads; all of these impede their research momentum post-PhD (Maphalala and Mpofu 2017). This finding raises a concern as the barriers to advancing women has been in academic debates and quite a series of studies have been conducted in this regard. For instance, workloads are inequitably distributed across gender, making it harder for women to become promoted to full professors because they often end up in service-heavy roles that leave little time for research (Fox Tree and Vaid 2022). Nkumane (2018) found that a lack of support was a constraining factor for Black women academic researchers. Monnapula-Mapesela (2017) and Shober (2014) state that funding is a problem for the advancement of the Black women academics. Ramnund-Mansingh and Khan (2020) also found that access to funding will assist Black women academics in conducting research to advance in their careers.

The findings of this study that related to the contributors were as follows: perseverance, collaboration, co-supervision, motivation, mentorship and support, including institutional support. Monnapula-Mapesela (2017) and Madileng (2014) also found that Black women

academics needed the perseverance to progress to higher levels. According to Nkumane (2018) and Van der Wal et al. (2020), Black women academic researchers should be encouraged to collaborate with other academics to improve their research skills. Boateng (2018) is in agreement that collaboration might be useful for emerging Black women academics to progress in their careers (Boateng 2018). Singleton (2021) mentions the importance of guiding Black women's careers by using proper mentorship. The findings are in line with what Chitsamatanga et al. (2018) found that mentorship is required specifically for the emerging cohort of Black female academics. Notably, mentorship is fundamental for the advancement of the Black women in academia, particularly in research endeavours and Maphalala and Mpofu (2017) share similar sentiments where they found that South African higher education institutions should focus on providing mentorship programmes to facilitate women's contributions to research. Zulu (2021) states that Black women academics should be mentored in order to progress to professorship and that universities should support them to advance to professors. Monnapula-Mapesela (2017) agrees that South African universities should create an enabling environment to support the advancement of Black women academics. Boateng (2018) also agreed that mentors are essential for the career progression of Black women in academia. Kasprowicz et al. (2020) as well as Bell et al. (2020) also found that it is important to implement initiatives to build the capacity of Black women academics in universities.

The feminist theory links to the findings of the study in the sense that Black academic women shared their experiences of the challenges in their career progression. As Collins (2000) suggested, Black women told their stories from their point of view to work on their own for empowerment. This study is underpinned by Black feminist academics who shared their experiences.

Recommendations

In order to address the constraints in advancing Black women academic researchers in a South African context with specific reference to a university in South Africa, research must be a priority and not only teaching. Problems with a work-life balance must be addressed by assisting guidance to these women. Engagement sessions must be conducted with these women to alleviate research challenges and how to deal with a male-dominated environment. The university understudy must also address time constraints and a lack of support and funding for Black women academic researchers. Then also, the contributors to advancing Black women academic researchers in this university should be further discussed and focused upon. Contributors such as perseverance, collaboration, co-supervision, motivation, mentorship and institutional support are of utmost importance for these women.

Social justice is an important dimension of South Africa's democratic commitment and is also a key function of universities in terms of addressing racial and gender inequalities related to access and success and the underrepresentation of Black women (Zulu 2021). It is therefore recommended that South African universities develop and implement interventions to advance Black women academics. In order to optimise the potential of Black women academics, workshops on work/life balance, time management, motivation, career planning, networking and collaboration should be conducted. A workshop should also be held by the NRF to explain the rating process. Each candidate should be assigned a mentor and should apply for funding, such as is offered by the NRF Thuthuka or the Black Academics Advancement Programme. Article writing workshops should be attended by each of the targeted candidates. Holman, Stuart-Fox, and Hauser (2018) suggest that the gender gap needs to be closed with regard to the academic publishing of women.

For future research, it is recommended that a quantitative study be done to measure the impact of the interventions to advance Black women academics. A comparative study between the various South African universities can also be conducted to identify the possible needs and unique advancement strategies of these women.

CONCLUSION

The two-fold purpose of the study on which this article reports was firstly, to investigate the constraints to advancing Black women academic researchers at a Southern African university and secondly, to investigate the contributors to advancing Black women academic researchers at this same university. The constraints and contributors to advancing Black women academic researchers deserve the necessary attention in order to develop and retain these women in the South African higher education environment. There ought to be a deeper inquiry into how best to ensure the advancement of Black women academics at universities in South Africa.

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