RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Mentoring as Support for African Women's Academic Career Trajectories

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Abstract

Women in academia face many challenges. Although there have been possibilities for the advancement of women in higher education, gender discrepancies in leadership continue, with women facing structural challenges such as bias, and unequal possibilities for promotion. Balancing a career as a female academic, including parenting and family obligations adds another layer of complication, often resulting in breakdown. Women contribute distinct strengths to academia, expanding intellectual conversation and establishing varied learning environments. Mentorship, sponsorship, and inclusive policies assist in reducing barriers and encourage women to thrive as leaders, resulting in positive change in the academic setting. The article outlines the nuances of women in academia and the challenges and opportunities they face when pursuing leadership positions. It further explores the experiences and views of women in the faculty of Business at a University of Technology (UOT). A mixed methods approach was adopted to enable the researcher to give a female perspective to the academic position, experiences, and challenges within academia. The researcher used her judgment to select the sample based on the purpose of the research and a convenience sample to select best-case scenarios. Finally, the article suggests a participative model of collaboration, nurturance, compassion, and self-care to equip women with the tools they need to create career advancement opportunities and increase personal and professional change.

Keywords: women; academia; leadership; mentorship; career advancement

Introduction

In South African Higher education institutions (HEIs), one notes a glass ceiling that acts as a barrier to women advancing to positions of leadership (The glass ceiling is a metaphor used to describe the invisible barriers and societal limitations that prevent women from advancing to higher-level positions in their careers). The underrepresentation of African females in top management positions needs to be revised and continues to exist in the South African higher education sector. The National Plan for Higher Education of the Ministry of Education (RSA DoE, 2001) and the Transformation and Reconstruction of the Higher Education System (RSA DoE, 2002) are policies that South African Higher Education institutions must take heed of as advocators of the removal of obstacles to the advancement of women; and encourage their participation and contribution in the higher education space, particularly at senior levels. Although these advocators exist, there are still evident barriers. Alternate leadership is required to bring about change, seen as transformational leadership, where women should be given prominence in leadership positions.

In ensuring transformation, HEIs in South Africa face many challenges. Transformation refers to the ongoing process of addressing historical inequities, creating a more inclusive and representative academic environment, and addressing the legacies of the apartheid era. This includes increasing access to higher education for historically disadvantaged groups, improving the representation of women and people of colour in academic leadership positions, and promoting inclusive curriculum and teaching practices. The transformation process is ongoing and requires a collective effort from stakeholders within higher education institutions to ensure changes

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in institutional policies, practices, and attitudes to create a more equitable and inclusive higher education system in South Africa. Transformation is ongoing and is a concern, and one wonders why African women are not advancing to senior positions. Have we taken the time to understand the barriers that women encounter to navigate the academic space? Women in higher education in South Africa have long since used social circles to cope with their struggles due to a lack of mentoring programmes. This has emerged as an informal means of mentorship since only a few universities ensure formal mentorship programmes for staff. Fear and anxiety and some of the major challenges that stand in the way of advancing an academic career for women at HEIs. The inclusion of a mentor programme can be beneficial to a women's career. It should be considered because it creates a participative atmosphere for the foundation for career development for women.

Barriers and Enablers for Women in Leadership in Academia

Various challenges and barriers haunt women when it comes to attaining leadership positions. One of the key challenges is that of gender bias and stereotypes that prolong the notion of women's inferiority in leadership roles. Cultural norms and societal expectations further limit women's opportunities for career advancement. Organisational barriers, such as a lack of gender-sensitive policies and practices within organisations, can hinder women's progress. Gender-based discrimination and unequal access to resources, networks, and mentoring opportunities further impede women's advancement. Offsetting work and family responsibilities remains a significant challenge, as traditional gender roles and limited support systems burden women. According to Kele and Pietersen (2015), institutions of higher learning were coerced to execute policies aimed at elevating women to managerial positions, which was part of the transformation agenda at HEIs and in government departments in South Africa. South African HEIs have yet to make the desired progress in this regard, but the aspirations to achieve the required government objectives remain. Women are said to constitute over 50% of the higher education workforce in South Africa; however, there is still the lack of women in senior positions. This is evidenced in the report published in the Mail and Guardian by Macupe (2020), who detailed the shortage of women leaders in South African higher education.

Macupe (2020) reports that a gender headcount of university staff in South Africa reveals 86 678 women and 75 788 men. 6250 women hold master's degrees compared to 5882 men; 5561 women are qualified with PhDs compared to 8022 men. 30% of professors are women, and there are 1500 NRF-rated female researchers as opposed to 2600 male NRF researchers. As of 2020, there were only four women Vice Chancellors, and in the recent year, we have lost one-woman VC. This report shows that females have not had the opportunity to advance to leadership positions in South African higher education institutions over the past years. The advancement of women in higher education in South Africa has been slow; however, some women have made some strides in accessing leadership positions and closing the gender gap, which has resulted in a gradual rise in the number of women occupying key positions within universities, including deans, deputy deans, department heads, and vice-chancellors. Furthermore, South Africa has witnessed the emergence of women-led research and academic networks, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing among female academics. Despite these positive developments, challenges remain, such as gender-based discrimination and the underrepresentation of women in certain disciplines. Therefore, ongoing efforts are crucial to sustaining progress, ensuring that women in South African higher education continue to advance and thrive. However, challenges such as gender biases, power, stereotyping, and work-life balance persist.

Tabassum and Nayak (2021), are of the view that gender stereotyping continues although provision has been made for equal opportunities in workplaces. Although this upgrade has been made, with a slight increase in numbers of women advancing to leadership posts in academia, gender bias emerges as an influential theme in South African society, where social stereotypes against female leadership tend to have a negative effect when it comes to the advancement of women into leadership positions. This is mainly because the perception of the societal roles of females leads to prejudicial appraisals of women leaders (Tabassum and Nayak, 2021). Stereotypes profoundly impact women's confidence and self-perception, particularly within an academic setting. These societal beliefs perpetuate harmful histories that limit women's potential and undermine their sense of self-worth. One prevalent stereotype portrays women as primarily nurturing and emotional rather than logical or assertive. This stereotype makes it difficult for women to assert themselves or take on leadership roles. The pressure to conform to societal expectations further weakens their confidence and discourages them from pursuing ambitious goals. The consequences of these stereotypes are far-reaching. Women may face self-limiting beliefs that hinder their professional growth and development. It is crucial to foster inclusive and supportive environments

to address these stereotypes and their impact on women's confidence and self-perception. Encouraging open dialogue about gender biases, providing mentorship programmes, and promoting positive role models can help challenge and demystify stereotypes. Universities should borrow from best practices to actively create opportunities for women to showcase their abilities and achieve their full potential. We can foster a more equitable and inclusive academic environment by empowering women to recognise their worth, challenge societal stereotypes, and embrace their unique strengths.

Global Mentoring Best Practice

Some outstanding formal mentor programmes on the global front are discussed here, which can support institutions to learn from such successful initiatives and adapt them to their specific contexts to achieve the desired outcomes. Furthermore, best practice encourages collaboration and knowledge-sharing within the academic community, fostering a supportive network of institutions that empower women through mentoring. In March 2022, a forum was hosted by the African Women in Higher Education Network (WoHEN) and the Association of African Universities (AAU) to mark International Women's Day. At this forum talks stressed the importance of implementing policies that seek to ensure the provision of equal opportunities for both men and women to excel in African higher education institutions. Discussions emanated with recommendations that encouraged action and adoption by African higher education institutions and stakeholders to strengthen collaboration, address gender inequality and mainstream gender in curricula. Further, woman to support other women was encouraged, and women in positions of power were encouraged to create room for other young academics to excel and progress in higher education. More importantly, African higher education institutions were called on to prioritise mentoring and role-modelling as key strategies to empower more women (Kuagbedzi *et al.*, 2022).

Mentoring programmes for women academics are prevalent in most universities abroad. According to Nöbauer and Genetti (2008) and Rosser (2010), the European Commission and the National Science Foundation in US support the creation of mentoring programmes and networks and have a policy agenda in place. Other HEIs that have produced excellent formal mentoring programmes are the University of Leeds (2009). This programme provides mentoring for new junior staff, which is part of a probation process, which emphasises the continuity of research and the demands of teaching and administration. At the University of Oxford, a career accelerator programme for postgraduate research links Oxford alumni working on collaborative projects with other universities such as Cleveland State University (University of Oxford Learning Institute, 2006-7: 2). In South Africa, there is insufficient evidence of formal mentoring programmes at HEIs, however, leadership and mentorship programmes by other bodies, such HERS-SA, design programmes to support women in higher education both in academic and support areas to achieve career success within the higher education environment. (HERS-SA, 2021).

Another Leadership management programme in South Africa is that of the HELM Women in leadership (WiL) programme. HELM offers contextual leadership and management programmes for emerging, middle, and senior managers and university leaders that support professional development and career advancement. The programmes assist individuals in identifying their capacity needs and align their leadership development pathways with organisational objectives (HELM, 2020). Dixon-Reeves (2003), Garrett (2006), Perna *et al.* (1995), argue that there are many dynamics at play about diversity in academia and supporting the need to promote formal mentoring programmes for women is overdue. South African HEIs must consider global best practice programmes to strategize the need for formal mentoring initiatives and networks and to support the development of women and their retention in their academic careers.

Mentorship as an Enabler

Mentoring plays a transformative role in addressing gender disparities within academia. By providing guidance, support, and advocacy, mentors have the power to create significant positive change for women in their academic pursuits. Through mentorship, women are empowered to overcome the challenges posed by gender biases and stereotypes that often hinder their progress. Mentors can help women navigate these barriers, challenge societal norms, and build the confidence to pursue ambitious goals. Moreover, mentoring provides a platform for women to develop essential skills, expand their professional networks, and gain visibility within their fields. By actively engaging in mentorship programmes and implementing effective strategies, academic institutions can foster an inclusive environment that not only promotes gender equality but also enhances the overall success and well-being of women in academia. Through these collective efforts, mentoring has the potential to bring about a transformative shift, creating a more equitable future where women in academia may excel.

We have noted from global best practices that formal and informal mentoring programmes exist for HEIs. The formal aspect is privileged, whereas, in informal programmes, a basic programme is designed by highlighting the mentee's needs and matching this with a mentor; the development of the mentorship is guided and supported with training and networking opportunities. Clutterbuck and Ragins (2002) agree and emphasise that formal mentoring programmes guide mentors to provide exposure and visibility to a protege and demonstrate competence. Establishing formal mentoring programmes in academia requires careful attention to several critical aspects to ensure their effectiveness and success. First, clear objectives and goals for the mentoring programme must be defined, outlining the desired outcomes and benefits for both mentors and mentees. A well-defined structure, including the programme's duration, frequency of meetings, and expected time commitments, is essential to clarify and set participant expectations. Recruiting and selecting mentors with relevant expertise, experience, and a genuine commitment to supporting mentees is crucial for creating a positive mentoring relationship. Providing mentor training and resources to enhance mentors' skills in effective communication, active listening, goal setting, and feedback delivery is essential. Additionally, establishing a fair and transparent mentee selection process, and aligning mentees' needs with suitable mentors contributes to successful matches. Regular monitoring and evaluation of the mentoring programme's progress, impact, and overall satisfaction are necessary to make continuous improvements. Securing institutional support, resources, and recognition for the mentoring programme is important for integration into the academic culture.

A mentorship programme benefits the mentor, mentee and the university and will see the university benefit from higher retention levels and superior leadership competency. Kahle-Piasecki and Doles (2015) agree that mentoring provides mentees with increased social networks that they would not otherwise have access to. Bright and Bond (2004), on the other hand, believe that the benefits of such programmes will be for mentees to adapt to changing circumstances and to assimilate to new conditions created by change, become aware of institutional norms and cultures, make more realistic judgements of capacity as an academic, especially about own achievements. It is an advantage to mentor female academics, as it allows them to excel in their careers through raising their awareness in academia, guiding them with managing work-life balance and priorities and creating a supportive and collegial academic environment. Guiding women in managing work-life balance and priorities while creating a supportive and collegial academic environment is essential for their success and well-being. Institutions can provide resources and support systems to help women navigate the challenges of juggling multiple responsibilities. This could include flexible work arrangements, such as remote options, to accommodate family obligations and personal commitments. Encouraging open communication and dialogue about work-life balance can help remove stigmas and create a supportive atmosphere where women feel comfortable discussing their needs. Creating mentorship programmes in faculties, specifically tailored to address work-life integration, can provide guidance and advice from experienced faculty members who have successfully navigated similar challenges. By implementing these measures, academic institutions can empower women, alleviate the burden of work-life conflicts, and foster a supportive environment of self-care that enables women to thrive in their personal and professional lives.

Self-Care and Compassion and Ethics of Care

Self-care and compassion are crucial aspects of caring for women in academia, given their unique challenges. Academic environments are demanding and high-pressured and take little time to assess mental, emotional, and physical well-being. It is essential to encourage women to prioritise self-care and provide resources and support for their holistic well-being. This includes promoting work-life balance, offering mental health resources, and providing access to wellness programmes and initiatives. Fostering a culture of compassion and understanding within academic institutions is vital. Encouraging mentorship and peer support networks that give priority to empathy, active listening, and understanding can create a community where women feel valued, supported, and cared for. By prioritising self-care and cultivating a compassionate academic environment, women in academia can enhance their resilience and overall well-being and ultimately thrive personally and professionally.

The ethics of care framework is essential for supporting and empowering women's academics. This ethical approach emphasises the importance of nurturing relationships, empathy, and attentiveness to the needs and well-being of individuals within a given context. Applying the ethics of care to women academics' entails recognising and addressing the unique challenges they face, such as work-life balance, gender biases, and discriminatory practices. Such a framework will create a supportive environment that prioritize inclusivity, understanding, and collaboration. We must create islands of sanity – Who do you go to when you need guidance and someone to

listen? By embracing the ethics of care, we can create an environment that values and respects the contributions of women academics, ultimately enhancing their well-being, job satisfaction, and overall success.

Methodology

A qualitative and quantitative approach was used in this study to enable the researcher to give a female perspective to the academic position, experiences, and challenges within academia. The researcher used her judgment to select the sample based on the purpose of the research, which is in line with the thinking of Saunders *et al*. (2012). Etikan *et al*. (2016) suggest that convenience sampling and purposive sampling are nonprobability sampling techniques that a researcher uses to choose a sample of subjects from a population; in this case, the researcher used a convenience sample to select best-case scenarios. A sample of 15 women academics were selected and comprised senior and junior women selected from the business faculty at a South African University. The participants were selected according to the years they had been lecturing at the university and their engagement in the area of research. The selection also entailed women academics who were deemed established and those deemed emerging in their research careers. There is a distinction between women academics deemed established and those considered emerging in their research careers. Established women academics have attained recognition for their significant contributions to their respective fields. They have a substantial publication record, possess expertise in their research areas, and often hold prestigious positions or leadership roles within their institutions. Emerging women academics are at the early stages of their research careers. They are building their publication records, establishing their research interests, and seeking professional growth and advancement opportunities. The motivation for selecting both senior and junior women in higher education was premised on the view that there would be a balance in terms of views on the subject. A questionnaire was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from the academics. All participants responded to the same interview questions, and triangulation was adhered to through document analysis. All transcriptions were done manually after being electronically and manually recorded.
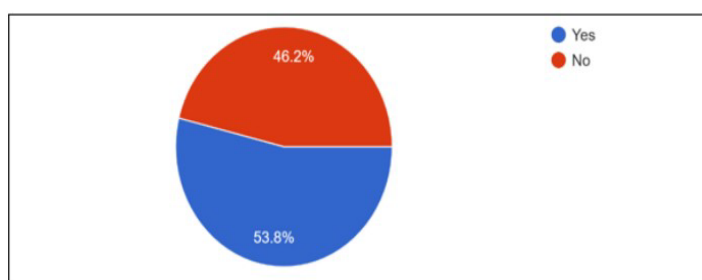
Results and Discussion

Figure 1: Exposure to mentoring and networking

Of the 13 responses received, 53.8% of the sample indicated that women were exposed to mentoring and networking while 46.2% indicated that they had not had exposure. These sentiments were mostly received from junior academics. The majority reveals that there is a need for mentorship programmes in the faculty and is in line with Perry and Parikh's thoughts (2017) that fostering empowerment between a mentor and mentee is important so that they both succeed in their professional and personal spaces. Participants perceived that woman-to-woman mentorship relationships can help address the challenges women in faculty face in their personal and professional roles.
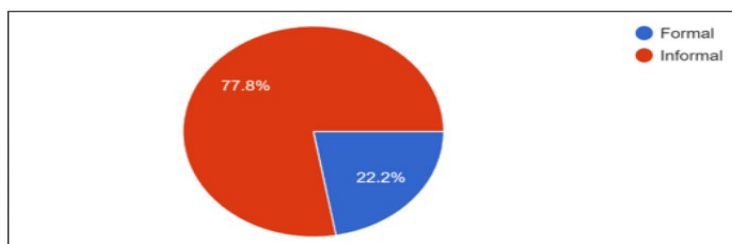

Figure 2: Mentoring programmes

Seventy-seven per cent (77%) of the respondents indicated that they received informal mentorship, while 25% received some kind of formal mentorship. The majority of the respondents initiated that they received informal

mentoring from a trusted person. Cotton and Ragins (2000) in their earlier studies suggest that informal mentoring is more beneficial than formal mentoring and leaves the academic with many career development opportunities, such as coaching, and increasing protégés exposure and visibility.
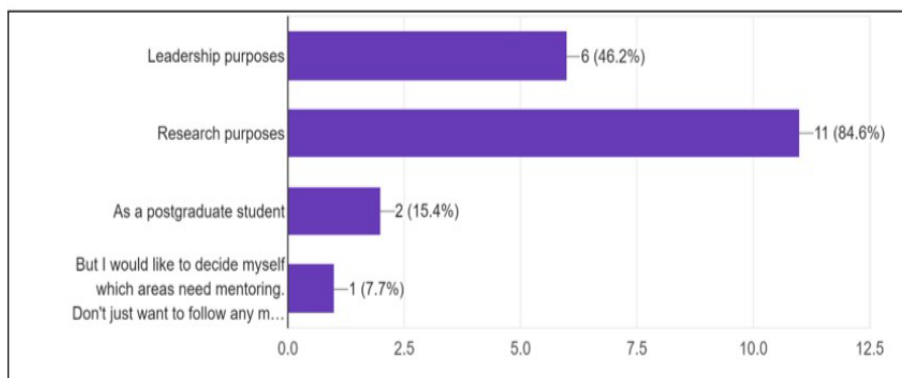

Figure 3: Capacity of mentorship

The majority of respondents (84.6) indicated that they would prefer to be mentored for research purposes. While 46.2% indicated a preference for leadership purposes and 15.4% for postgraduate studies. In mentoring for research purposes, respondents indicated a request for requirements for support from mentors in light of guidance to write and unspoken knowledge on scholarly publishing, guidance on post graduate studies, funding and grant applications (the lack thereof which impacted negatively on their careers), mobility, collaboration and introduction to research networks.

Waghid and le Grange (2003) emphasise how important research output is in the life of an academic and point out that research and development is a core strategic intent for any HEI and must produce scholars whose work merits are recognised. It is therefore important to have a good mentorship programme for research to offer support, advice, and encouragement to staff to fulfil their potential and advance their research careers.
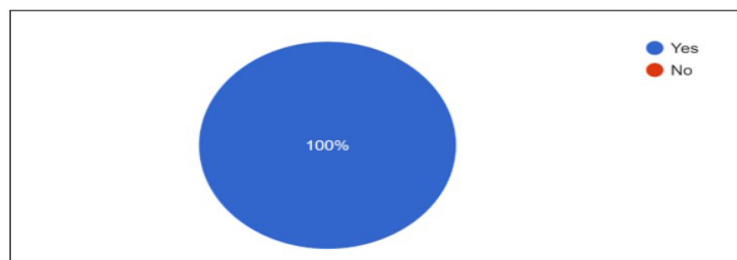

Figure 4: The importance of mentoring for female academics

Respondents were asked what their thoughts were on the role of mentoring for next generation women in academia. All responses to this question indicated that there was a dire need for mentorship of women academics, which would assist with career development and provide approaches to support women to cope with their job demands in the academic space. Etzkorn and Braddock, 2020; Sarabipour *et al.* (2021) are of the opinion that mentoring support for women has gained attention on the global front for academics at higher education institutions (HEIs) and has readied younger academics with the tools to meet society's expectation of the profession.

Table 1: Challenges faced by women academics

Challenges females have been faced with in an academic environment		
Work Life Balance	**No support**	**Gender Bias**
Balancing workload, career development (postgraduate studies, conferences, publications etc), family responsibilities and self-care.	Overall support was lacking, Human Capital does not recognise or support female academics in contract positions to create sufficient, effective, and productive female academics with stable, permanent working conditions.	One often has less authority than male colleagues.

Finding the time and learning to prioritise are the biggest challenges.	The lack of support automatically reduces the productivity, morale, work-life balance, and overall wellbeing of female academics.	I lecture in a group where I am the only women. I find that admin duties in general gets dumped on me. I have also had allot of challenges where the men just do not do what is expected of them and nothing seems to happen to them. Then I have to pick up the pieces and my research development suffers as a result.
Work and family often take priority.		To overcome gender bias - this only started to happen when I was in leadership positions.
Research and studies take a back seat to the detriment of our own development.		
Time - could only work early hours of morning, workload in my role is strenuous, family responsibilities as single mother.		
Time is always an issue and how to plan.		

Respondents were asked what challenges impact their everyday lives. They indicated that work life balance, female academics in contract positions are not recognised or supported, research, time management, funding and resources, lack of authority as opposed to male colleagues, time management and academic overload were the main challenges faced. They feel afraid to raise these challenges. O'Loghlin, (2010) supports the views of women faced with such challenges and believes that being reluctant to address their work/life balance due to their fears may slow their career advancement. He stresses that they must balance family and career tasks which will develop a healthy proportion on the quality of the various aspects of their lives and ensure that they balance their time for their families.

Support from Academic Institutions

Respondents were asked how the academic institution might support the mentoring process in order to develop and retain novice staff.

Respondent 1 indicated:

> *Flexibility - there's no one size fits all approach as each staff has different needs, i.e. different stages personally and professionally. The staff member believed that although there cannot be a programme for each staff member, "FLEXIBILITY" is key. Line managers must understand individual needs of their team members and provide development support accordingly.*

Respondent 3 indicated:

> *Securing contract staff who are valuable and productive despite facing challenges and problems employ female academics in permanent positions, should be a priority. When stability is provided by tertiary institutions (not abusing staff on contract for 12+ years - missing out on pension, benefits etc) including mentoring and caring, staff will automatically advance.*

Respondent 5 indicated:

> *Indicated that a conducive and supportive environment must be provided. There should be specific events arranged where people can share their stories, experiences and concerns.*

> *Respect diverse gender roles, dedicated time for research, collaborative research activities, small mentoring groups that work on a personal basis (i.e. not online), as well as a specific mentor per person, reduced workload, flexibility in scheduling training, dedicate a specific mentor to each staff, teaching skills in confidence and how to stand out in a group of people, were requirements for a supportive environment.*

Respondents disclosed that flexibility is key, securing contract staff and allowing equal benefits and providing a conducive and supportive environment and including small mentoring groups were very important in the guidance to women working towards advancing their careers.
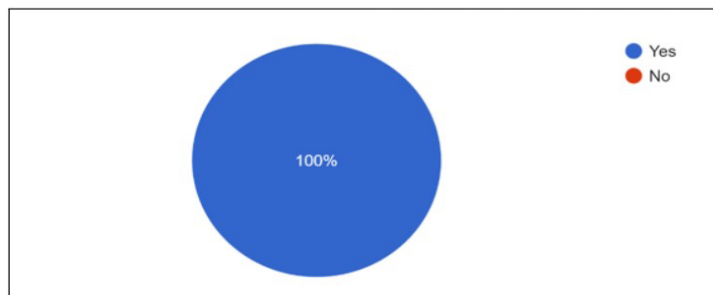

Figure 5: Collegiality and teamwork amongst scholars

All respondents were 100% in agreement with this question and believed that collegiality and teamwork were important. They believed that having a strong mentor that is dedicated and committed will enhance the programme. Adcroft and Taylor (2013) are of the opinion that mentoring serves as a positive tool in support of women's career development.
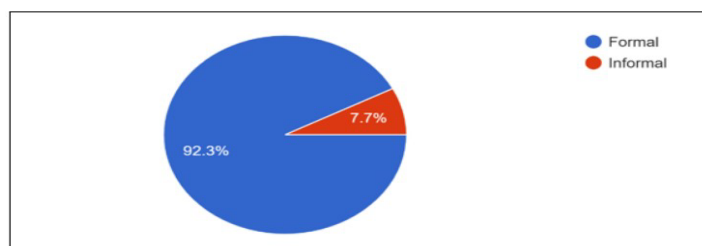

Figure 6: Should universities have formal or informal mentorship programmes

Ninety-two per cent (92.3%) agreed that a formal mentorship programme was important to the growth and development of staff in the business faculty. Respondents shared their views on how mentoring could enhance their professional knowledge and skills at the university. Mentoring for women is especially important for their integration into university life, as well as to their future career advancement. The respondents shared their experiences of the possibility of formal and informal mentorship programmes and how they perceived mentoring important for their career trajectory. Owusu-Agyeman (2022), believes that formal or informal mentoring support will provide the skills and expertise of senior professors and lecturers to be shared with the junior staff to support advancement.
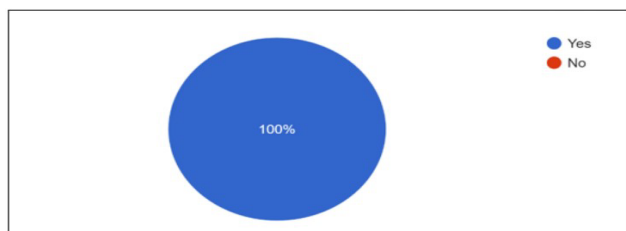

Figure 7: Recommendation of colleagues to be involved in mentorship programmes

All respondents were 100% in agreement that established researchers and experienced staff should be a part of the mentorship programme. Established senior academics have much experience which can assist in moulding a young academic. Owusu-Agyeman (2022) believes that established academics understand the importance of mentoring from an institutional point of view and support young academics to adjust in their work environment, understand the institutional structure and culture, and enhance their overall well-being.

Importance of Seminars or Workshops for Mentorship

Respondents were asked whether seminars or workshops were necessary during mentorship and agreed that the following were necessary.

Respondent 1 indicated:

> *The importance of enhancing overall wellbeing as leaders. The importance of personal leisure time to clean the clutter and emotions of "not coping" and feeling overwhelmed to an extent that you "feel" that you cannot mentor anyone despite the skills and contribution you can make.*

Respondent 2 indicated:

> *The attendance at funding application workshops, mental health, article writing, transcribing, coding and research skills and writing were important while other respondents viewed dealing with work overload, total life management, work life balance of a working scholar mother and personal well-being were imperative.*

It emerged that respondents were keen to have workshops or seminars on overall wellbeing, mental health, research skills, total life management and work life balance and personal well-being. Their responses reveal that as women they deal with many challenges and there is no one to turn to. Providing such workshops will give them the peace and guidance they severely need.
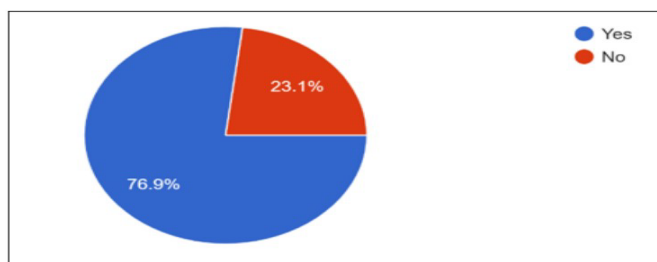

Figure 8: Nurturance, compassion and caring from mentor

Respondents felt strongly about compassion and care and nurturance, 76.9% indicated that they would like this from a mentor. Senior staff members who are experienced and advanced in the area of research will fit this request. Hafsteinsdóttir *et al*. (2017) believe that a mentor is "a coach, advice giver, counsellor, guide, role model, and an experienced facilitator". Senior staff who act as mentors possess the skills and features of being genuine, caring, compassionate, trustworthy, and respectful, an excellent communicator, a team player, and a person who forms a special connection with the mentee overtime to promote the mentee's future success.

Recommendations

A "laissez-faire" approach exists in academia as compared to the private sector and infers that the academic sector has been less proactive in promoting mentoring. University leadership must enforce implementation of equity plans and comply with government policies for the empowerment of women. Total life management, balancing work and family demands, guidance in research related activities including funding opportunities and lack of care and nurturance is some of the major challenges experienced by women academics in this academic setting, which they indicate may strongly impair their careers. These challenges must be highlighted to the leadership of HEIs or line managers of women academics. This would ensure a change in the HEI structure and that leaders will advocate for the formulation of new policies to develop a mentorship programme that will foster the career development of women academics. The findings indicate that institutions of higher education should encourage the establishment of academic and leadership support networks for women, formulate policies that are aimed at fast-tracking women with leadership potential and provide formal mentorship programmes to assist with research and leadership aspects.

Further to a good mentorship programme, women academics must take time for self-care to preserve and improve their health and well-being. They need to ensure that they do not neglect their well-being. The participative model has been established to be included in a good mentorship programme for women academics to take time for self-development and self-care.

Self-care encompasses various elements that contribute to overall well-being. Physical self-care focuses on taking care of one's body through regular exercise, nutritious eating, adequate sleep, and attending to physical health needs. Emotional self-care emphasises the importance of recognising and addressing emotions, practising self-compassion, and developing coping mechanisms. It involves cultivating self-love, acceptance, and emotional resilience. Professional or social self-care emphasises respecting one's choices and values in their career and social life. This may involve setting career goals, seeking professional development opportunities, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Finally, spiritual self-care involves nurturing one's sense of purpose, meaning, and connection to something greater than oneself. It may involve practising mindfulness, meditation, engaging in religious or spiritual activities, or spending time in nature. By attending to these dimensions of self-care, women can promote their holistic well-being and enhance their quality of life.
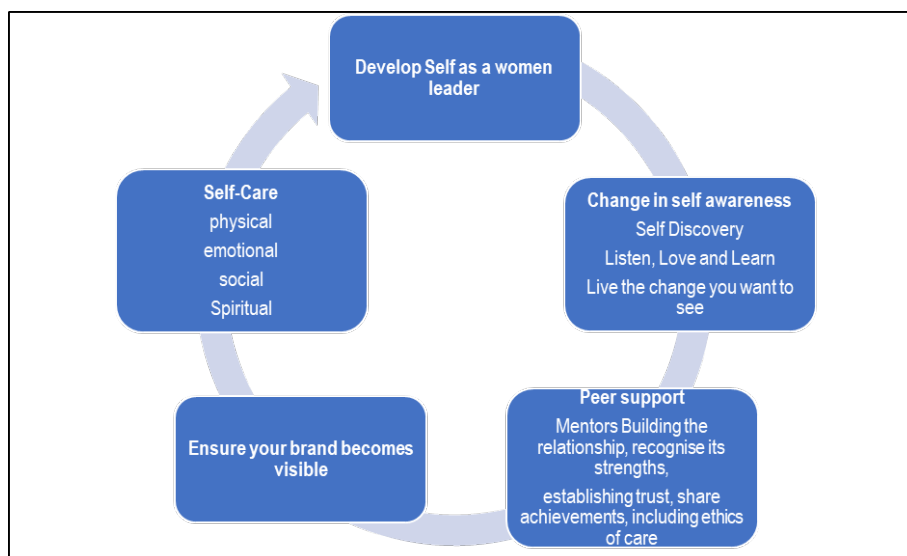

Figure 9: Participative model for self-development
Source: Researcher's conceptualisation

The model guides an individual to ensure self-discovery through cognitive (what do I say to myself) and behavioural (what will I do for myself) enablers. To ensure that one lives the change you want to see. The peer support aspect explores important characteristics such as building relationships, collaboration, nurturance, compassion, sensitivity to others' needs and caring and ensuring that your brand becomes visible, who you are, and what you want to achieve. Self-care guides the woman academic to take time for herself, to stop and consider how to use her strengths and reconnect physically, emotionally, and socially and to care for others.

Developing oneself as a women leader involves an intricate and continuous growth, self-reflection, and skill-building process. It begins with cultivating self-awareness, understanding one's strengths, values, and areas for development. Women leaders must build confidence, assertiveness, and effective communication skills to navigate challenges and advocate for themselves and others. Developing leadership competencies, such as strategic thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving, is crucial for taking on leadership roles with competence and impact. Women leaders can also benefit from seeking mentorship and guidance from established leaders, building networks and relationships, and accessing professional development opportunities. Embracing a growth mindset and being open to learning from experiences and feedback is key to continuous improvement as a leader. Developing resilience and emotional intelligence and balancing competing priorities is essential for long-term success. By investing in self-development and embracing leadership development opportunities, women can further develop their potential, navigate barriers, and make a positive impact as leaders in their respective fields.

Conclusion

This article centred on academic mentoring for women, understanding the rationale for mentoring of women, exploring the thoughts of women academics on mentorship in a business faculty at a University of Technology, and proposing a model for self-development and self-care. Evidence from the empirical study reveals that at institutions of higher learning, mentoring programmes should be considered a priority to provide support and professional guidance to the growing number of women academics wanting to advance their careers. We must encourage women to embrace leadership roles and unlock their full potential as women in academia. It is crucial to provide mentorship, support, and professional development opportunities that empower women to envision themselves as capable and deserving of leadership positions. Access to resources, networks, and opportunities that enable the growth and advancement of women must be provided. When women are empowered to embrace leadership roles, they contribute unique insights and experiences that enrich academic environments leading to greater innovation, collaboration, and progress and driving positive change in their fields.

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