



Reflecting on female academics' narratives on communication strategies in higher education institutions

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Abstract

Higher education institutions across South Africa and globally have implemented various strategies to support female academics. These initiatives aim to address gender disparities by fostering mentorship, collaboration, and career development opportunities specifically designed for women. They also seek to enhance publishing rates, employee retention, and engagement. However, achieving a balance between these objectives and the realities of working in historically male-dominated environments remains challenging. Recent research has highlighted the increased responsibilities placed on women during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they had to navigate remote work while managing family care and meeting professional deadlines. Black Feminist Thought and Khan's Model of Engagement are utilised as appropriate frameworks for exploring the narratives of female academics in higher education institutions. The study conducted a systematic literature review to explore the persistent disparities and systemic barriers women face in South African higher education institutions. Thus, the researcher used Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Sabinet, and Taylor & Francis to retrieve and analyse information from scholarly documents published between 2014 and 2024. The study contributes to the broader discourse on transforming education and amplifying the voices of marginalised individuals within academic settings.

Keywords: communication strategies; gender equity; higher education institutions; higher education institutions in South Africa; women in higher education.

Introduction

The participation of women in higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa has evolved significantly over the past decades, shaped by advancements and persistent challenges in gender equity (Wadesango, Malatji & Chabaya, 2020). Historically, women have faced various challenges in accessing higher education compared to their male counterparts (Mohloakana & de Wet, 2020), pursuing careers in higher education (Naicker, 2013), and advancing in their careers in higher education (Latchanah & Singh, 2017). This denied them the opportunity to develop themselves and, in turn, create better life opportunities for both themselves and their families. However, Black women endured the most significant hardships due to apartheid—subjected to the triple effect of gender, race, and class discrimination (Naicker, 2013).

An earlier study by Cloete, Moutin and Sheppard (2015) found that despite an increase in the number of Black women PhD scholars from 10 in 1996 to 106 in 2012, a 960% rise, this did not necessarily result in increased appointments of Black women in academia in South African HEIs. MacGinty (2024) highlights that although the number of Black female graduates has increased, these graduates continue to struggle to find employment. According to Ntshongwana (2024), the South African higher education sector is a good example of how few women are in leadership roles. Although South Africa celebrated its democracy in 1994, 30 years later, it is nowhere near achieving gender equality. Of the 26 South African HEIs, Naidu (2018) found that only six universities were led by women. This is the reality in South Africa and, more broadly, across sub-

Saharan Africa, where women constitute only 24% of academic staff and 2.5% of vice-chancellors.

Phakeng (2015) highlighted that Black PhD women are marginalised by the “masculinity of power,” suggesting that although there have been advancements in HIEs to ‘allow’ women in the workplace, women of colour are still significantly underrepresented. Black women academics face numerous barriers that hinder their advancement in academia (Schultz & Rankhumise, 2023:258). A UNESCO (2021) report revealed that women remain underrepresented in senior academic roles in the higher education sector, as well as in STEM classrooms worldwide, in industry and research fields, in reputable publications, and in decision-making bodies in many countries.

The current state of HEIs in South Africa presents a complex landscape characterised by challenges and opportunities, particularly in the context of female academics. Recent research in this area has highlighted the increased need for female representation and access to equal opportunities, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated gender disparity and imbalanced job responsibilities—both at home and at work (Casale & Posel, 2021). Despite legislative efforts developed in post-democratic South Africa, such as the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, which goes beyond ending unfair discrimination to promoting affirmative action in the workplace, a study conducted by the National Research Foundation (NRF) (2024) found that significant disparities still exist. Similarly, the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) was established in terms of Section 187 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa to promote respect for gender equality and to protect, develop, and attain gender equality (South African Constitution, 1996).

The rationale for this study stems from identified gaps in the existing literature regarding effective communication strategies that enable female academics to share their narratives within HEIs in South Africa. Despite increasing attention to access, equity, and opportunities for women in South African HEIs (Dosunmu & Dichaba, 2024), there is a need for research focusing on how formal communication strategies can be developed to

support and alleviate the experiences of female employees, thereby improving their work experience and tenure. The current literature explores the challenges and opportunities faced by female academics. However, it does not adequately address how communication practices can be utilised and must evolve to support diverse staff and enhance employee engagement. This systematic literature review aims to fill this gap by synthesising existing research on communication practices and narratives. This contribution will enhance theoretical understanding and provide practical recommendations for HEIs seeking to foster a more equitable and engaged workplace.

Thus, this study aims to address this gap by exploring the following research questions:

- What narratives do female academics in South African higher education institutions share?
- What communication strategies do female academics in higher education institutions in South Africa use?
- What improvements have women in higher education institutions in South Africa experienced as a result of sharing their narratives?

Theoretical framework

This study employs Black Feminist Thought and Khan’s Model of Engagement as appropriate frameworks for exploring the narratives of female academics in HEIs.

The basic premise of Black Feminist Thought is that the different voices of Black women in academia ought to be heard, as argued by Osada and da Costa (2009). This theory is rooted in the need to encourage women to tell their stories from their points of view and perspectives (Collins, 1990). Therefore, this theory is suitable for this study, as its aim is to reflect on the narratives of female academics in HEIs.

Khan (1990) identified three psychological conditions that are associated with employee engagement, namely meaningfulness, safety, and availability. These elements suggest that employees are more engaged at work when they perceive that their contributions matter to the organisation and when they receive recognition

from their peers and leaders. The safety aspect relates to feeling safe at work both physically and psychologically. This also includes the management style, encouraging culture, and an environment that allows them to be themselves openly. Availability refers to the mental and physical vigour employees bring to their jobs. Availability can be influenced by personal and organisational factors. These three conditions are required for female employees to perform their tasks optimally.

Literature review

Narratives shared by female academics in South African higher education institutions

While several studies have noted significant progress in gender equity in HEIs, substantial inequities persist for women (Agbede, Govender & Pillay, 2024). These challenges include, but are not limited to, barriers to academic progression and career development, race, identity and belonging, workplace harassment, and institutional issues that prioritise domestic responsibilities over career pursuits. Ntshongwana (2024) identified a lack of funding as a notable challenge for females in HEIs. Additionally, Mbukanma and Strydom's (2022) study at a South African university revealed that unfair recruitment processes, societal attitudes, low self-esteem, and a lack of mentorship programmes impeded women's academic careers. These challenges contribute to the underrepresentation of South African women in leadership positions in academia, as well as in fields and roles traditionally dominated by their male counterparts.

Conversely, earlier research by Mahabeer, Nzimande and Shoba (2018) found that Black women continue to be marginalised in the academy as a result of the enduring patriarchy and the lasting impact of apartheid and postcolonialism that still prevails in South Africa. Not much has changed today as Black women academics are still significantly underrepresented in South African HEIs; as a result, they face numerous barriers that impede their advancement in academia (Agbede et al., 2024; Hlatshwayo & Ngcobo, 2023; Schultz & Rankhumise, 2023; Phakeng, 2015). These challenges include workload, a lack of prioritising research, work-life balance, early and late research challenges, a male-dominated environment, time

constraints, lack of support, and funding challenges (Schultz & Rankhumise, 2023:258), which stalled—and in some cases halted—their progress.

Findings from a study conducted by Zulu (2020) in two South African universities revealed that the implication of racial discrimination and patriarchy has resulted in fewer women in senior positions in HEIs, such as in university management roles or vice-chancellors. This study revealed two primary challenges that Black women professors encountered: being unwelcome in academia and being undermined in their leadership roles. These findings suggest that although women in general encountered challenges in HEIs, Black women experienced the harsh realities more as a result of their race.

In addition to the various challenges discussed above, Sahumani, Majola and Ngirande (2023) opine that the institutional culture supports women's advancement in HEIs. Thus, women are more likely to succeed when the organisation's culture values and recognises their contributions. In fact, Mashile, Munyeka and Ndlovu (2019) state that institutional culture is identified as a critical factor in academic turnover.

It is important to note that most studies addressing the challenges women face in HEIs have predominantly been conducted by women, as evidenced in this study, underscoring the need for continued research to address these issues.

Communication strategies used by female academics in higher education institutions in South Africa

In the context of 'narratives,' communication can be described as the information exchange process via single or multiple signals, with an anticipated response. Communication allows individuals to establish and maintain relationships, convey information, or plan activities (Dudzinski & Gregg, 2018). The communication can be expressed through spoken words, written messages, or non-verbal body language. The message is encoded by the sender, meaning that a specific expression is made through certain words and other channels (Moini, Akinso, Ferdowski & Moini, 2023).

Parry, Moodley and Masisi (2024) highlight the importance of academic conferences in providing women a platform to discuss challenges and advocate for change. They believe that conferences offer a safe space for academics to connect, develop, and support one another.

Additionally, several studies used focus group discussions (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2019), structured and semi-structured interviews (Mkhize, 2024; Anwana & Kayode, 2023; Hlatshwayo & Ngcobo, 2023; Zulu, 2020; Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2019; Latchanah & Singh, 2017; Shoher, 2014), and surveys (Dosunmu & Dichaba, 2024; Sahumani et al., 2023; Schultz & Rankhumise, 2023; Casale & Posel, 2021; Mashile et al., 2019) to provide a platform for women in HEIs to narrate their experiences and challenges related to gender bias in HEIs and work-life balance. Some of their views were shared in the preceding sections.

From a general standpoint, in a study that sought to compare the views of senior and junior female academics on strategies used to overcome barriers to career development, Chitsamatanga and Rembe (2019) found that most academics identified family and spousal support, self-confidence, and collaboration with peers as key factors in advancing their careers. Additionally, Govender, Khumalo and Abede (2024) state that embracing 'sisterhood' or forming support groups where females support each other, validate each other, are loyal to each other, and trust each other based on their common understanding of the challenges women in encounter in academia is vital for their various academic journeys. Additionally, this sisterhood could empower women to speak openly and learn from each other's experiences, challenges, and growth, fostering healing from some of the unspoken issues faced within HEIs. What is evident from the above findings is that creating a community of support for women is imperative not only for them to succeed in HEIs, but also for them to be engaged in their work, find meaning in it, and feel a sense of security.

Based on the above, it is evident that there are no formal communication channels or platforms available for women to formally address

or raise gender equity issues experienced in South African HEIs.

Improvements women in higher education institutions in South Africa experienced as a result of sharing their narratives

From a professional development perspective, Mbukanma and Strydom (2022) and Chitsamatanga and Rembe (2019) found that revised recruitment policies, promotion opportunities, and support programmes are critical to advancing women's academic careers. As a result, HEIs must prioritise initiatives such as mentorship opportunities, as well as platforms where women are free to share their experiences, support others, and receive support. Ntshongwana (2024) opines that the limited mentorship opportunities in HEIs contribute to some of the challenges female academics experience.

In their exploration of gender transformation and policies that advocate for social justice and gender equality in higher education, Mdlenleni, Mandyoli and Frantz (2021) found that to redress and hasten social transformation, the democratic era has employed several policy frameworks to ensure a more just and equitable society; affirmative action is one such policy. This policy is defined as "the additional corrective steps which must be taken in order that those who have been historically disadvantaged by unfair discrimination are able to derive full benefit from an equitable employment environment" (South African Department of Education, 1998:4). Other policy efforts highlighted by Mdlenleni et al., (2021) include the South African Constitution, the CGE, and Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5, which aim to ensure inclusivity and equity in education, and aim to promote gender equality and empowerment of women, respectively.

Furthermore, research has shown that funding resources are crucial for the success of women in HEIs. Schultz and Rankhumise (2023) identified the NRF's Thuthuka funding programme aimed at supporting emerging researchers. However, they highlighted that only a few funding opportunities target Black academics, particularly Black women. Ntshongwana (2024) shares that she received funding for her postgraduate studies. This support and exposure

enabled her to complete her postgraduate studies in record time. She later received the Female Academic Leaders Fellowship grant, which she believes will support her career advancement and, in turn, enable her to mentor female postgraduate students. Additionally, in a study focusing on the 'publish or perish' phenomena on women's development in HEIs, Anwana and Kayode (2023) found that South African respondents were aware that funds were available in faculties and institutional research offices; however, the stringent requirements for accessing the funds made it difficult to access them. For example, they stated that to be eligible for international conference funding, one must first present at a national conference and publish a paper in a journal accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Conversely, a White female academic noted the negative impact of her ethnicity on opportunities for bursaries and grants, noting that it may have contributed to her low salary (Shober, 2014). She explained that applying for academic positions in the current HEI context would have hindered her chances of securing a lecturing position at her institution, given its mandate to prioritise Black South Africans first. Even academic funding lists preferences for Black women and the previously disadvantaged, which exclude her. Although strides are being made to increase access for Black females in HEIs, this often overlooks other races, such as the example provided above.

Adopted methodology

This study employed a systematic literature review technique to compile research on amplifying the voices of women who are marginalised within academic settings. According to Moher, Shamseer, Clarke, Ghersi, Liberati, Petticrew, Shekelle and Stewart (2015), "a systematic review attempts to collate all relevant evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a specific research question."

As indicated in the study's abstract, the scholarly documents for the study were obtained from seven databases, namely Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Sabinet, and Taylor & Francis. These

scholarly documents were evaluated based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

- Published in the English language
- Published in South Africa
- Published between 2014 and 2024
- Focusing on female academics' narratives in HEIs

The researcher employed a comprehensive electronic search strategy, examining 21 scholarly documents published between 2014 and 2024. To identify relevant literature, the systematic review included search terms such as 'voices of women in South African universities,' 'voices of South African women in universities,' 'communication strategies used by women in higher education institutions in South Africa,' 'communication strategies used by South African women in higher education institutions,' 'how women share their challenges in higher education institutions in South Africa,' 'how females communicate their challenges in higher education institutions in South Africa,' 'experiences of women in higher education institutions in South Africa,' 'experiences of women in South African higher education institutions,' 'females in higher education institutions in South Africa,' 'females in academia in South Africa,' 'females and academia in South Africa,' 'challenges of women in universities in South Africa,' 'challenges of females in universities in South Africa,' 'opportunities for women in higher education institutions in South Africa,' and 'opportunities for females in South African higher education institutions.'

The study adhered to five steps to assess the studies that would be included in this systematic review, namely framing the question for review, identifying relevant work, assessing the quality of the studies, summarising the evidence, and interpreting the findings (Sundani & Mangaka, 2023). A total of 21 relevant scholarly documents comprised the final literature, although 61 were yielded from the initial search. Due to irrelevant information and duplicates, 43 scholarly documents were excluded and thus omitted from the study. After selecting the scholarly document for inclusion, data such as author(s), publication year, title of publication, and consulted document

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were extracted from each research deemed eligible for this study. The scholarly documents used in this study are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Scholarly documents used in the review

Author(s)	Year	Title of Publication	Consulted Document
Agbede, Govender and Pillay	2024	Editorial - Advancing African women in academia: Charting modern solutions	African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies
Dosunmu and Dichaba	2024	Women and higher education: Access, equity, and opportunities for women in the workplace	South African Journal of Higher Education
Govender, Khumalo and Agbede	2024	Sisterhood in academia - Storying our experiences in higher education	African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies
Mkhize	2024	Teaching while Black: Black women millennials' experiences of teaching in South African Universities	Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education
Ntshongwana	2024	The importance of mentorship opportunities for women in academia: A systematic review	African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies
Parry, Moodley and Masisi	2024	Engendering change: Feminist considerations of online conferencing as a safe space in the narratives of South African women academics during COVID-19	South African Journal of Higher Education
Anwana and Kayode	2023	Women in higher education institutions and the challenge of academic progression	Interdisciplinary Journal of Economics and Business Law
Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo	2023	Are we there yet? An intersectional take on Black women academics' experiences in a South African university	Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)
Moini, Akinso, Ferdowsi and Moini	2023	Chapter 21 - The communication process	Health Care Today in the United States, Academic Press
Sahumani, Majola and Ngirande	2023	Organisational cultural factors and barriers affecting women's career success at a selected institution of higher learning in South Africa	International Journal of Social Science Research and Review
Schultz and Rankhumise	2023	Constraints and contributors in advancing Black women academic	South African Journal of Higher Education

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		researchers at a university in South Africa	
Casale and Posel	2021	Gender inequality and the COVID-19 crisis: Evidence from a large national survey during South Africa's lockdown	Research in Social Stratification and Mobility
Mdleneni, Mandyoli and Frantz	2021	Tenacity of gender inequality in South Africa: A higher education perspective	Policy and Practice: A Development Education Review
Mbukanma and Strydom	2022	Challenges to and enablers of women's advancement in academic careers at a selected South African university	International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
Zulu	2020	The struggles and the triumphs of South African Black women professors	South African Journal of Higher Education
Chitsamatanga and Rembe	2019	Narratives of strategies used by female academics in South African and Zimbabwean universities to overcome barriers to career development	Journal of Human Ecology
Mashile, Munyeka and Ndlovu	2019	Organisational culture and turnover intentions among academics: A case of a rural-based university	Studies in Higher Education
Mahabeer, Nzimande and Shoba	2018	Academics of colour: Experiences of emerging Black women academics in curriculum studies at a university in South Africa	Agenda
Latchanah and Singh	2017	An investigation of the challenges faced by women when progressing into leadership positions: A case of the IT division at Barclays Africa Technology (trading as ABSA)	Journal of Management and Administration
Phakeng	2015	Leadership: The invisibility of African women and the masculinity of power	South African Journal of Science
Shober	2014	Women in higher education in South Africa	Advances in Gender Research

Results

The findings in this study represent the researcher's interpretations of the lived experiences of women in South African HEIs.

Narratives shared by female academics in South African HEIs

Various disparities

The findings of the study revealed several inequalities in HEIs, including barriers to academic progression, career development, racial dynamics, employee harassment, and institutional issues that prioritise home responsibilities over professional endeavours (Agbede et al., 2024). This suggests that women continue to face various inequalities despite the changes implemented in HEIs to promote gender equity.

Funding resources

The findings revealed a lack of funding as a key challenge for females in academia (Ntshongwana, 2024). This implies several critical issues, including limited access to opportunities and its impact on retention (Dosunmu & Dichaba, 2024).

Patriarchy

The findings of the study revealed that Black women continue to be marginalised in HEIs due to the patriarchy and the impact of apartheid in South Africa (Mahabeer et al., 2018). As a result, Black women are often excluded from senior roles and thus underrepresented in leadership positions (Agbede et al., 2024; Hlatshwayo & Ngcobo, 2023; Schultz & Rankhumise, 2023; Phakeng, 2015).

Institutional culture

The findings of the study reveal that a lack of organisational culture impedes women's success and advancement to senior leadership positions in HEIs (Sahumani et al., 2023; Mashile, Munyeka & Ndlovu, 2019). This indicates that women are more likely to succeed in an environment with a culture that encourages and supports them. Furthermore, the institutional culture plays a significant role in shaping one's sense of safety. A positive culture, characterised by

inclusivity, support, and respect, reinforces the psychological safety of its employees. When an institution fosters a culture that values diversity, open communication, and well-being, individuals are more likely to feel safe, leading to higher levels of engagement and productivity.

Day-to-day challenges

Other challenges highlighted in the findings include unfair recruitment processes, societal issues, low self-esteem, and a lack of mentorship opportunities (Ntshongwana, 2024; Mbukanma & Strydom, 2022). These challenges were deemed critical impediments to women's academic careers, resulting in the underrepresentation of South African women, particularly Black women, in leadership positions within academia and male-dominated fields.

Communication strategies female academics in higher education institutions in South Africa use

Sisterhood

The findings highlight that forming a 'sisterhood' or support group with fellow female academics supports one's mental health and work performance (Govender et al., 2024). The support groups can also be used to collaborate and share ideas.

Academic conferences

The study's findings revealed that women attend academic conferences not only to present their work and network, but also to discuss their challenges with fellow women facing similar struggles (Parry et al., 2024). This provides an opportunity to share burdens and offer mutual support.

Focus group discussions

The findings highlight that women utilise focus group discussions as a platform to share their experiences, challenges, and opportunities in HEIs in South Africa (Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2019). Effective communication within an HEI provides clear expectations, encourages open dialogue, and fosters a sense of belonging, all of which are essential for motivating individuals to fully invest in their roles.

Structured and semi-structured interviews

The findings reveal that several women used structured and semi-structured interviews to narrate their experiences of equity in academia, with a particular focus on HEIs in South Africa (Mkhize, 2024; Anwana & Kayode, 2023; Hlatshwayo & Ngcobo, 2023; Zulu, 2020; Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2019; Latchanah & Singh, 2017; Shober, 2014). Suggested reasons for using this communication channel vary from facilitating reflection and flexibility to ensuring safety and comfort.

Online surveys

Most consulted sources, such as Dosunmu and Dichaba (2024), Sahumani et al. (2023), Schultz and Rankhumise (2023), Casale and Posel (2021), and Mashile et al., (2019) revealed that online resources provide a platform for women in HEIs to narrate their experiences and challenges related to gender bias in HEIs and work-life balance. Open and transparent communication plays a crucial role in creating engagement and a sense of meaningfulness at work.

Spousal and family support

The findings indicated that a primary communication platform for female academics was the support they received from their spouses and families. Dudzinski and Gregg (2018) believe that one effective way to facilitate this support is through open communication, which includes sharing experiences related to their studies and work challenges. The researcher is of the view that the safety element identified in Khan's (1990) Model of Engagement plays a crucial role in this process, providing the emotional support and stability necessary for personal growth. When individuals feel supported by their spouses or family, they are more likely to engage meaningfully and thrive in their work.

Improvements women in higher education institutions in South Africa experienced as a result of sharing their narratives

Progress in gender equity

The findings of this study revealed significant progress in gender equity. According to Mbukanma and Strydom (2022) and Chitsamatanga and Rembe (2019), recruitment policies, promotion opportunities, and support programmes have been introduced. While these initiatives aim to advance women's careers in South African HEIs, it can be said that they also impact employee engagement.

Policy reforms

According to the study's findings, new and revised policies have been implemented in order to achieve transformation and gender equity in higher education (Mdleleni et al., 2021). These reforms have created opportunities for access and equality, leading to enhanced research and development, as well as increased publication outputs.

Funding resources

The findings have revealed that funding is necessary for women in HEIs (Schultz & Rankhumise, 2023; Ntshongwana, 2024). While several funding programmes are available, they are often not clearly communicated, and the qualifying criteria can be stringent. Moreover, accessible funding resources and programmes are essential for advancing research and increasing the number of PhD graduates among women academics in HEIs. Access to funding plays a crucial role in supporting one's career aspirations. Moreover, when funding is secured, it alleviates financial constraints, allowing individuals to focus on their work or studies without financial difficulty.

Progress in combatting discrimination against Black women

According to the study's findings, Black women academics continue to face marginalisation due to the patriarchy and the impact of apartheid in South Africa. They also face several barriers and remain significantly underrepresented in South African HEIs (Agbede et al., 2024; Hlatshwayo & Ngcobo, 2023; Schultz & Rankhumise, 2023; Zulu, 2020; Phakeng, 2015). However, it is not only Black women experiencing discrimination (Shober, 2014); their White counterparts have mentioned being

excluded from bursaries, for example, which are reserved for previously disadvantaged Black female colleagues. This suggests that recent attempts to transform historical practices and injustices are seemingly evident.

Limitations

This study reviewed the narratives of female academics regarding their challenges related to gender equity in HEIs in South Africa. Thus, the study was unique to this specific setting. While reviewing literature relevant to this study, the researcher discovered that a plethora of studies had been conducted in this context in South Africa; however, most studies reported that female academics used informal communication channels to share their experiences within their respective HEIs. Furthermore, the period under review was too broad; it should be limited to pre- or post-COVID-19 as organisations, including HEIs, experienced various policy changes and teaching and learning arrangements as a result of the pandemic.

Conclusion and future research directions

While significant strides have been made since the end of apartheid, ongoing efforts are essential to address remaining challenges and ensure that female academics can thrive in an equitable academic environment. By fostering a culture of open communication, South African institutions can benefit from the diverse contributions of female academics, ultimately enriching the educational landscape. Therefore, to amplify women's marginalised voices within academic settings, this study recommends the following:

- Garner leadership support and commitment to gender equity to ensure equity efforts are modelled by the leadership.
- Implement formal feedback mechanisms and communication channels to encourage female academics to voice their concerns freely and openly.
- Allocate training funds for each female academic, regardless of age and job level, for conference and training attendance.

- Promote available funding opportunities with women at all levels of the institution.
- Foster inclusion and representation by developing bespoke inclusion policies on addressing gender equity in the institution.
- Provide ongoing training for both male and female academics to educate them on gender equality.
- Conduct gender-focused research initiatives to ensure ongoing research on the topic.
- Establish support networks for women in junior positions, as the emphasis often tends to be on more senior women with PhDs.
- Collaborate with international HEIs for publications, funding opportunities, and international exposure.
- Develop an institutional culture that supports gender equity.

Disclosures

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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