



Challenges and Opportunities in Scholarly Writing for Female Academics at Kyambogo University in Uganda

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Abstract

Research productivity remains a key indicator of academic success in higher education, yet female academics publish significantly fewer scholarly works than their male peers, despite holding advanced qualifications and having access to government-supported research funding. This qualitative descriptive study investigated factors influencing research productivity among 29 female academics at Kyambogo University between May 2023 and August 2024. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymisation of participants' identities. This research uniquely applied an intersectionality-informed framework to demonstrate how personal challenges—such as time constraints, self-doubt, and limited research skills—interact with structural impediments including excessive workloads, inadequate mentorship, insufficient research infrastructure, limited funding, and systemic gender biases to undermine female academics involvement in scholarly writing. Findings reveal that while enablers—such as PhDs, research grants, co-supervision opportunities, journal access, and diverse fields—form a solid foundation for productivity, female academics continue to encounter systemic and personal barriers that inhibit full engagement. The study proposes strategic, intersectionality-based institutional interventions such as establishing a research support, Writing Centre, and creating communities of practice to address the barriers identified and leverages the intrinsic strengths of female academics. Together, these will improve female academics' scholarly output and ultimately foster more inclusive and sustained academic growth.

Introduction

Scholarly writing and publication are vital in academia, yet female academics continue to face gender disparities despite progress toward equality (Llorens et al. 2021). Although the academic world has made significant strides towards gender equality, gender disparities persist in various facets of academia. For instance, research from Malaysia, China, South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya highlights barriers that limit women's participation in scholarly publishing (Dhillon et al., 2015; Huu, 2015; Migosi et al., 2012; Okoduwa et al., 2018). Despite efforts to bridge gender gaps, male academics still dominate research output, and female academics' advancement to leadership and senior academic positions remains limited (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2021). While those studies help highlight the imbalances in scholarly writing and publication between female and male academics in contexts outside Uganda, inadequate attention has been paid to scholarly writing and publication among



female academics in Uganda. Research in Uganda's context, such as Nabawanuka (2023), has increased our understanding of Institutional Support Strategies for the Academic Career Progression of female lecturers. Meanwhile, Nakamanya and Bisaso (2023) have also generated rich insights about the kind of support needed for high-level female academics, like vice-chancellors, to succeed in their leadership roles. Furthermore, Atuhaire et al. (2025) provide an overview of the impact of institutional research culture on the research competence of lecturers at Kyambogo University, particularly for female academics. However, scholarly writing and publication have received limited attention, yet they form a bedrock in advancing academic knowledge and fostering innovation and advancement for female academics.

Kyambogo University, established in 2003, is a public university formed by the merger of three institutions: the Institute of Teacher Education (ITEK), Uganda National Institute of Special Education (UNISE), and Uganda Polytechnic (UPK). The university aspires to be a centre of academic and professional excellence, with a focus on research, capacity-building, education, and skills development. Its responsibilities include providing higher education, promoting research, and ensuring equitable access to higher education for all individuals, including those with disabilities. Overall, Kyambogo University has faced challenges in scholarly publications among the academic staff, as confirmed by the performance report for the financial year 2021/2022, which revealed significant discrepancies between the planned and actual research outputs (Kyambogo University(Kyambogo University, 2020).

The current scholarly gap highlights the need for Kyambogo University to recognise and harness the untapped potential of female academics in research and publication. Empowering women in scholarly writing within higher education institutions is essential for preparing future professionals, advancing meaningful research, and addressing local and global challenges. This importance of scholarly writing and publication is emphasised by scholars like Rosa & Clavero(2022) whose research reveals that it reveals that promotes gender equality, empowerment, and social change in academia. The paper's alignment with Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equality) underscores its relevance, as enhancing women's participation in scholarly publishing supports inclusive, equitable education and greater gender parity in academic spaces.

This paper examined the scholarly writing and publication experiences of female academics to identify key factors that influence their research productivity and academic advancement. It sought to deepen understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face, while contributing to the literature on research and scholarly writing from the perspective of female academics in Uganda. The study's objectives include:

1. To establish the scholarly writing and publication status quo for the female teaching staff at Kyambogo University.
2. To explore factors influencing female academic staff's engagement in scholarly writing and publishing.
3. To propose strategies that can be adopted to enhance female academic staff's engagement in scholarly writing and publishing.

Method

Study design

This qualitative descriptive study examined the scholarly writing experiences of female academic staff over a 15-month period (May 2023–August 2024). Crenshaw's (2013) intersectionality theoretical



framework, , provided a lens through which to study and analyse the interaction and intersection between female academics and factors that facilitate and/or hinder their engagement in scholarly writing and publication for academic advancement. The intersectionality theoretical framework is relevant to the current study because it signifies complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects that ensue when multiple axes of economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective, and experiential intersection in specific contexts (Davis, 2014).

Study Area

The research was conducted at Kyambogo University in Uganda.

Study Population and Sampling

The study targeted 29 female academics aged 30 to 65, including two associate professors, 12 lecturers, and 15 assistant lecturers. Participants were purposively selected to ensure relevance to the study's focus.

Data collection

Data collection was successfully conducted in two phases. The first phase involved an online workshop where 12 female academic staff participated in a SWOT analysis of scholarly writing and publication. The second phase consisted of a structured online survey, administered via Google Forms, which captured demographic information, perspectives on SWOT dimensions, and recommendations for enhancing scholarly writing among female academics.

Data analysis

The responses were tallied and analysed using Microsoft Excel, and the results were presented in percentages and frequency distribution. Verbatim quotes were used to triangulate results, offering depth and credibility to the findings.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Bishop Stuart University Research Ethics Committee (Reference No. BSU-REC-2023-523), valid from 8 May 2023 to 8 May 2024. All participants provided informed consent, and strict measures were implemented to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

Results

The study's findings reveal the current state of scholarly writing and publishing among female academic staff at Kyambogo University, the factors that influence their engagement in scholarly writing and the strategies that can be adopted to enhance female academics' participation in scholarly publishing and research.

Female Academics' Scholarly writing and publication status quo

The scholarly writing and publication status quo of female academics was established by identifying and recording the number of articles based on the author's gender from the University Institutional Repository in August 2024.

The documentary review highlighted a gender gap in academic publications at Kyambogo University, with female academics producing fewer publications than their male counterparts across all faculties and schools (Figure 1).

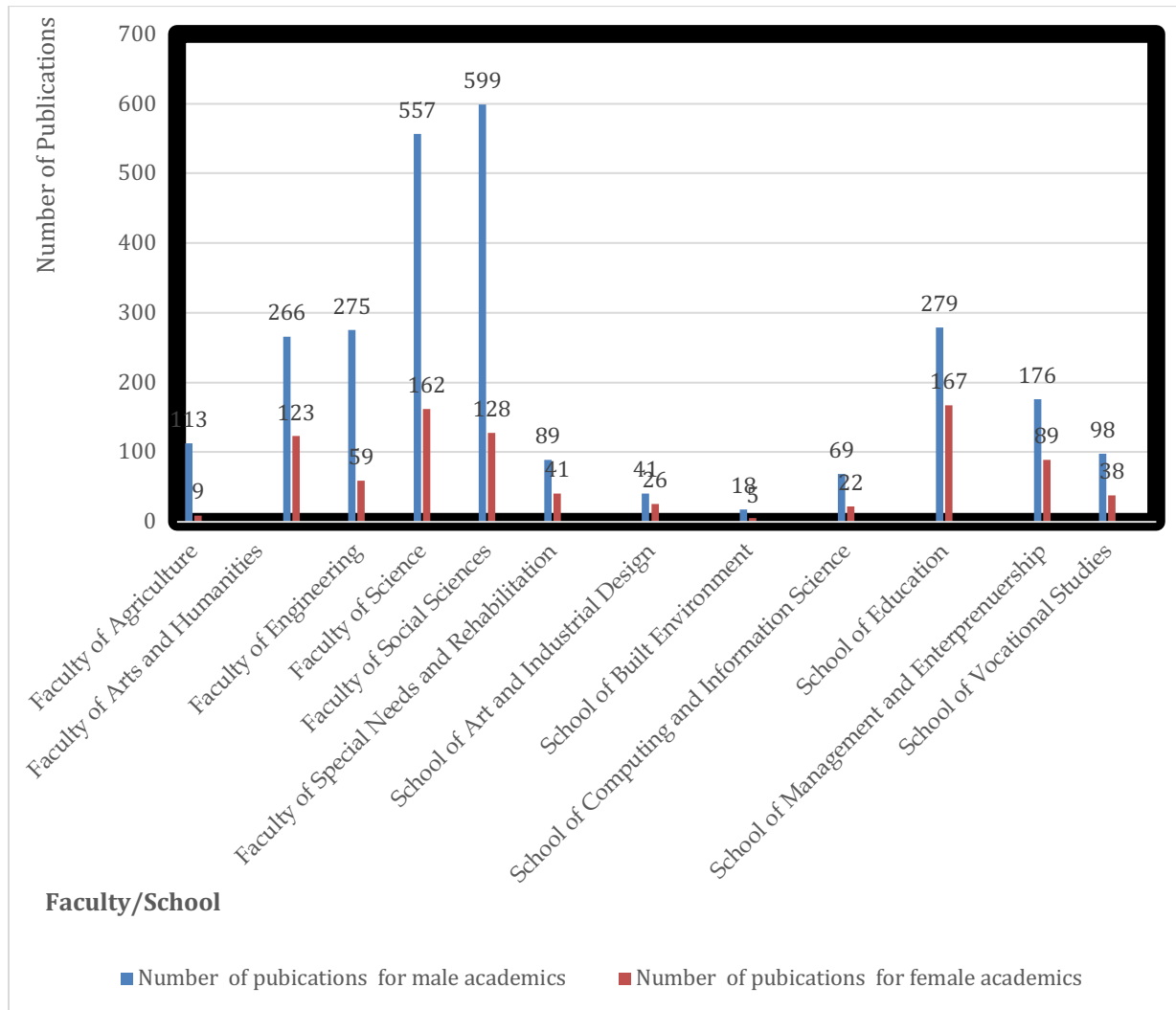


Figure 1: Scholarly writing and publication status quo of female academics based on articles published

Source: Kyambogo University Institutional Repository, 2024

Female academics’ Scholarly writing and publication competencies

Female academic staff at Kyambogo University demonstrated strong qualifications and capabilities, with 97% holding advanced degrees, 34% possessing solid research skills, 24% participating in collaborative projects, and 45% actively contributing to academic discourse. However, persistent challenges remain, as only 20% showed sustained engagement in reading and writing, 17% published across disciplines, and just 10% had adequate time for writing or were receptive to critical feedback, underscoring the need to address systemic and personal obstacles to improve research productivity (Figure 2).

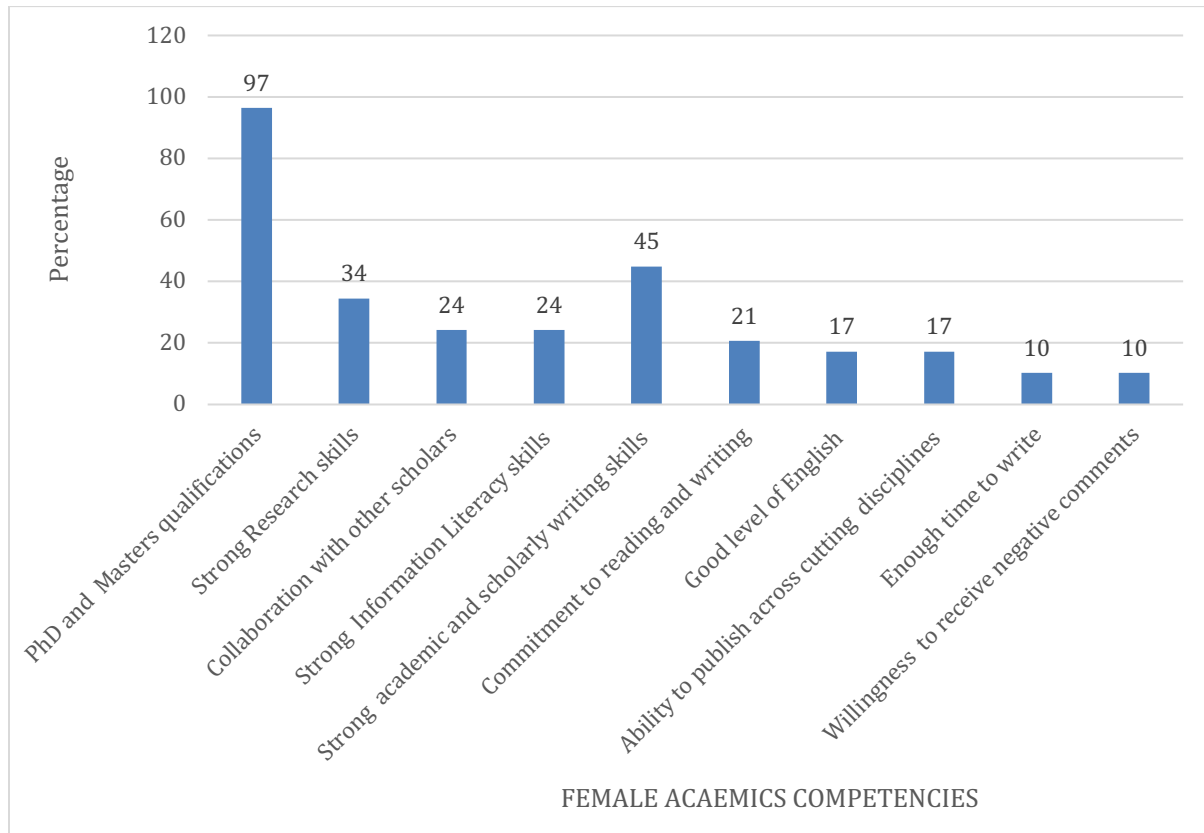


Figure 2: Female academics' scholarly writing and publication competencies.

The following verbatim quotation was selected to triangulate the above findings on competencies.

"I have a Ph.D., I have developed research skills, I have a network of researchers to work with, I have academic writing skills" (FAC 0016)

Overall, these findings have generated insights into the untapped competencies that female academics possess, highlighting an urgent need to harness these competencies for increased research output.

Enablers of female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication

Most notably, 59% of participants cited strong government support for research, while 41% pointed to access to competitive funding. (Figure 3).

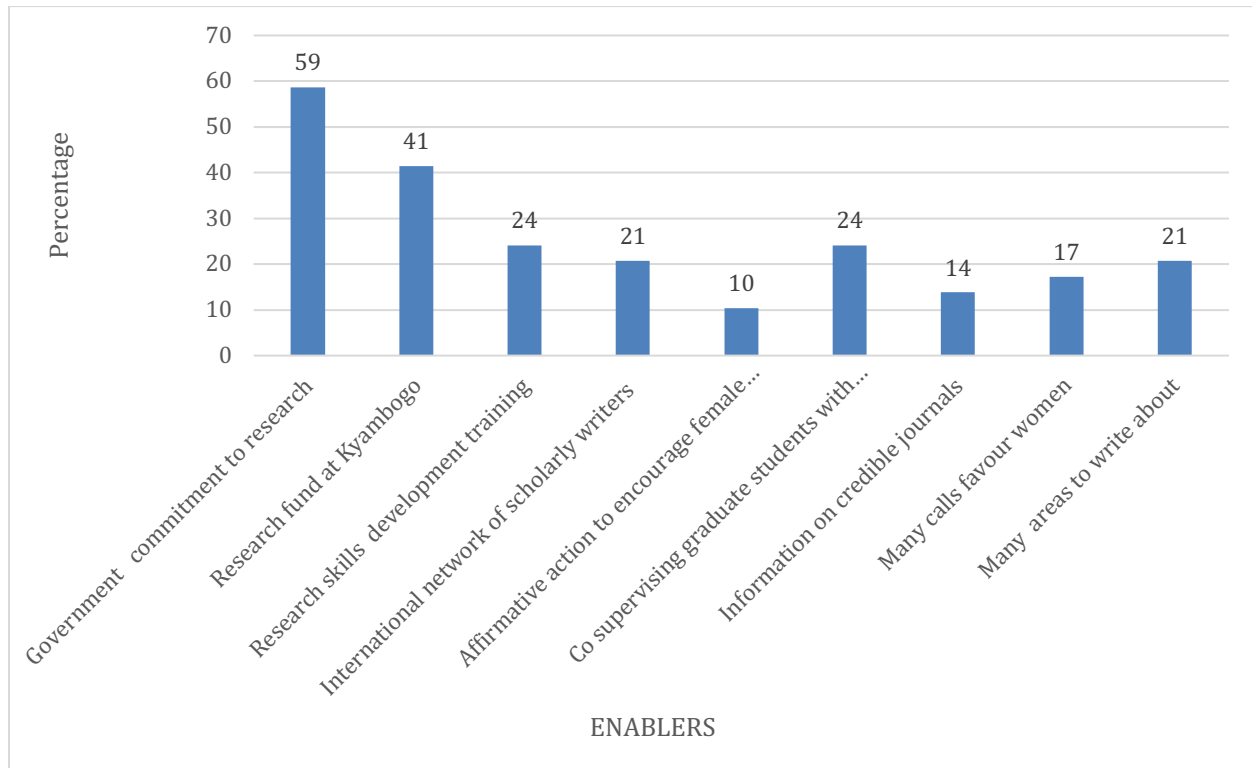


Figure 3: Enablers of female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication

The following verbatim quotations were selected to triangulate the above findings.

"... the availability of the competitive grant at Kyambogo University and many calls for proposals to which I can respond". (FAC 15)

These findings suggest that strategically leveraging the enablers identified by females could significantly enhance female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication.

Intrinsic barriers to female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication

Female academics at Kyambogo University reported several intrinsic barriers affecting research productivity, with heavy family responsibilities (97%) and inadequate scholarly writing skills (90%) emerging as the most pervasive. (Figure 4).

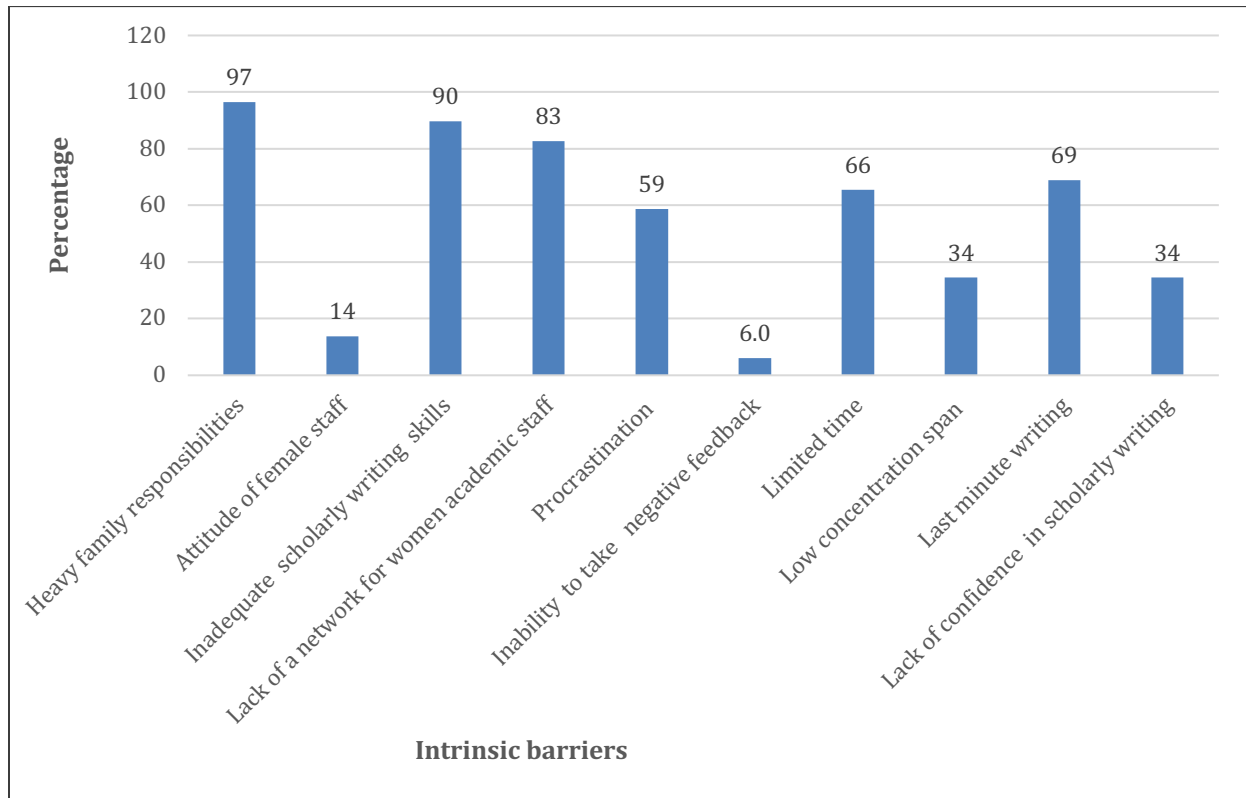


Figure 4: Summary of Intrinsic barriers that hinder female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication.

The following verbatim quotations were selected to triangulate the above findings:

"I am a family person who has a range of issues to attend to as a wife, mother, teacher and PhD student at the moment. I need to balance it all to live my full life. Therefore, it's not easy to think of scholarly writing now, given my status" (FAC 011)

"I have so many responsibilities, especially social ones, and these weigh me down. I often ask myself if I am cut out for academics rather than looking after my children" (FAC 013)

These findings have shed light on factors inherent among female academics that hinder their engagement in scholarly writing and publication.

Extrinsic barriers to female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication

The most prominent extrinsic barriers reported included heavy workloads and lack of female mentors (both reported by 97%), inadequate research funding (90%), and absence of an ethics committee (86%). Other critical challenges include poor working environments (85%), lack of systematic research training (76%), limited collaboration opportunities (66%), and high publishing costs (55%) (Figure 5).

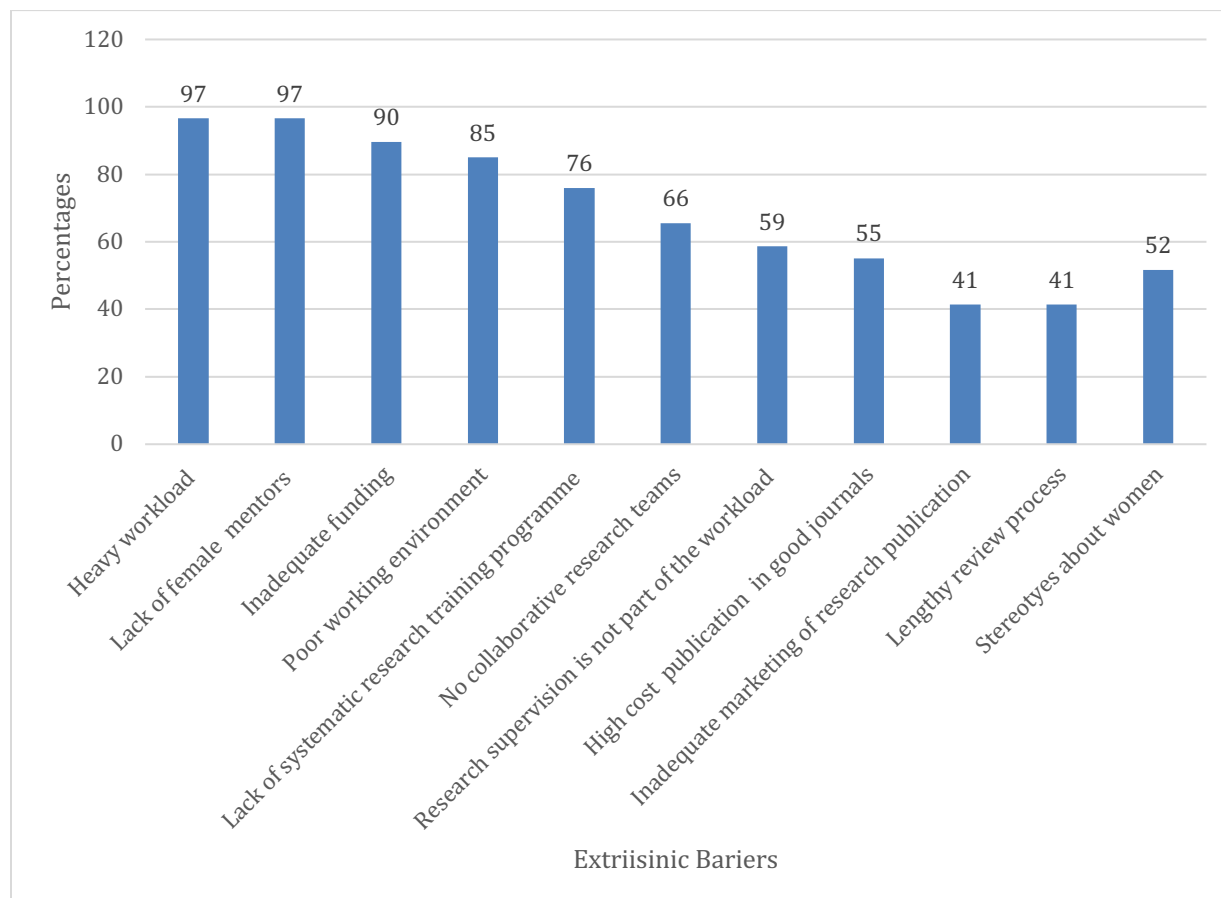


Figure 5: Summary of extrinsic barriers to female academics' scholarly writing and publication

The following verbatim quotations were selected to illustrate the extrinsic barriers experienced by female academics at Kyambogo University.

"...Balancing administrative, academic, community, and family roles with a heavy workload is a big limitation for me. ...uuh.. research supervision is not part of the workload". (FAC 001)

The University policies are not favourable. Uuh, teaching 15 hrs per week, aam. So many undergraduate research students to supervise, big numbers of students to teach and mark are all combining to take up time that I would have used to write and publish" (FAC 016)

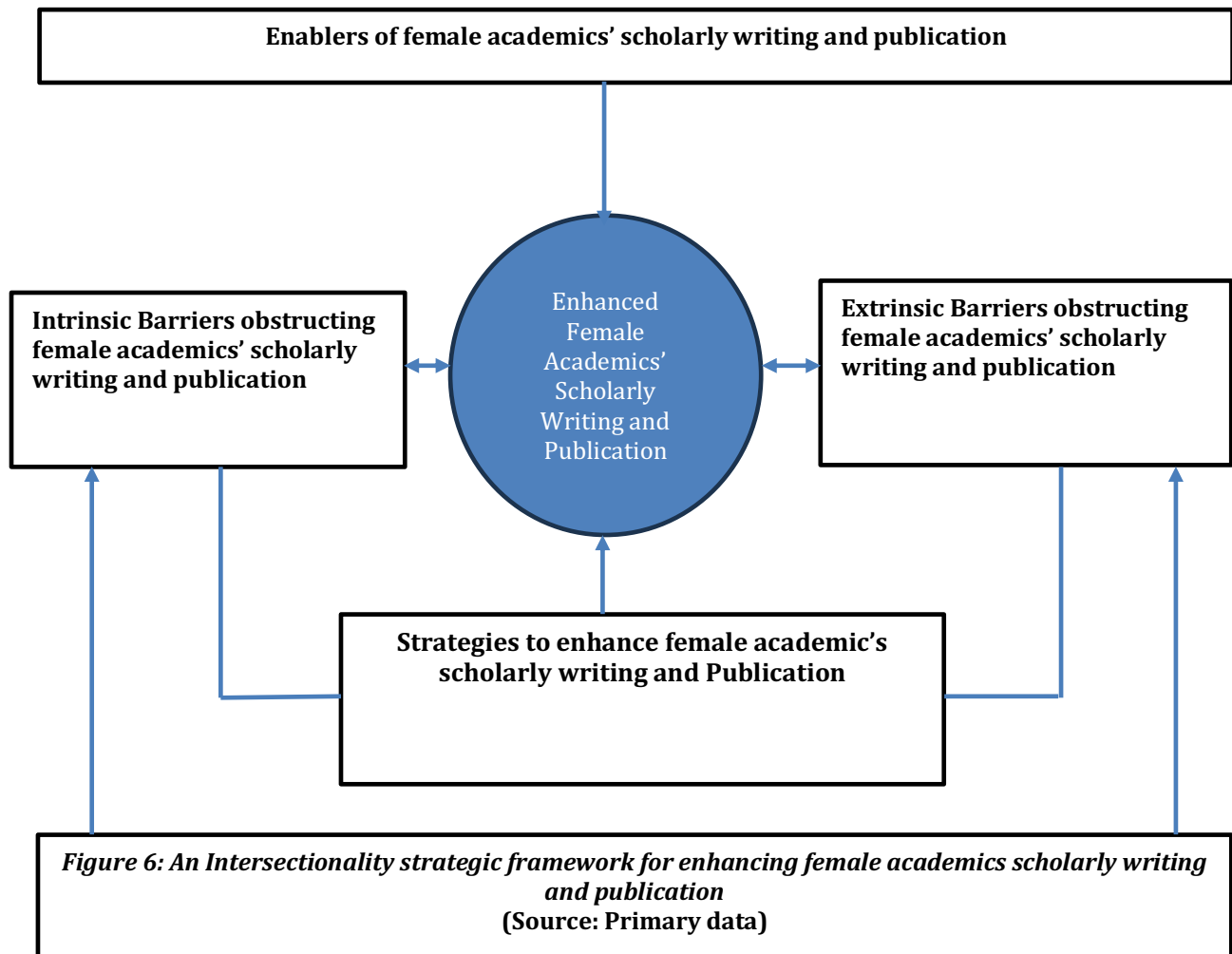
The study has identified the extrinsic barriers that hinder female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication, highlighting the need for targeted strategies and initiatives that addresses the barriers identified and leverages the intrinsic strengths of female academics to improve their scholarly output.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that, despite the demonstrated competencies of female academics and the presence of enabling factors, female academics continue to encounter both intrinsic and extrinsic barriers that significantly hinder their research productivity, resulting in lower publication output compared to their male colleagues. To this end, the study proposes an intersectionality-based strategic framework (Figure 6) as a potentially effective mechanism to support female academics in



scholarly writing and publication. This framework seeks to leverage existing capabilities and enabling conditions while simultaneously addressing the structural and individual-level barriers. A detailed discussion of the findings is given below.



Enablers of female academics' scholarly writing and publication

The findings of this study confirm that while female academics at Kyambogo University possess strong academic credentials and demonstrate research competencies, their scholarly potential remains underutilised. These disconnects between qualifications and output highlight a persistent tension in academic environments where structural supports do not fully translate into productivity. Prior research similarly notes that advanced degrees, although foundational, are insufficient to overcome systemic and personal constraints. (Muhumuza & Mbabazi, 2022).

Institutional enablers—such as government research support and access to competitive funding—align with global trends reported by Kwiek (2018), emphasising the significance of financial and policy-based interventions. Yet, the inability to capitalise on these opportunities underscores deeper



challenges rooted in institutional culture and personal circumstances. Existing literature, Defianty & Hidayat's (2020), reflects this gap, suggesting that policy frameworks often focus on output expectations rather than capacity-building support. Despite possessing PhD and master's qualifications, as well as the presence of institutional enablers, the study highlights a clear gap between potential and performance among female academics at Kyambogo University.

The study is consistent with Llorens et al. (2021), whose study among health practitioners in Europe revealed that, despite increased awareness of the lack of gender equity in academia and a growing number of initiatives to address diversity issues, change is slow, and inequalities persist. Thus, addressing gender disparities in academic publishing demands intentional, intersectional strategies that empower female scholars through structural and cultural change.

Intrinsic barriers to Female Academics' scholarly writing and Publication

The findings indicate that female academics experienced intrinsic barriers, such as heavy family responsibilities. This finding aligns with the broader literature, which reports that optimal work-life balance remains an unresolved issue in academia (Dubois-Shaik & Fusulier, 2017a; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). Thus, female academics are still trapped in the old university structure, which rested on a masculine figure who was utterly immersed in his work and did not have to perform any household duties, as an invisible person took care of all domestic tasks for him. This finding is consistent with research that revealed that parenting struggles are more significant for female academics because of reasons, including physical pregnancy, birth, and maternity leave experiences, all of which demand that women give up most of their research duties to raise their children (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016).

Psychological factors such as impostor syndrome, low self-efficacy, and reluctance to engage with critical feedback further hindered female academics' scholarly engagement. This finding is consistent with research, which reveals that female academics often have negative attitudes toward writing for publication and perceive it to be time-consuming when they do not have much time to write, yet negative perceptions have been reported to result in procrastination, which is responsible for negative emotions such as anxiety, fear of rejection, and lack of confidence, which results in postponing writing (Bidari, 2022; Defianty & Hidayat, 2020; Driscoll & Aquilina, 2011; Lendák-Kabók, 2022; Peiffer et al., 2020). These findings are consistent with research that reveals that factors such as impostor syndrome, self-doubt, lower levels of confidence, and self-efficacy can undermine female academics' belief in their capabilities, thus leading to hesitancy in submitting manuscripts, reluctance to present at conferences, and a reduced willingness to take risks in their research and writing endeavours (Peiffer et al., 2020).

The findings suggest an urgent need to organise workshops on writing for publication with special emphasis on combating negative attitudes and procrastination. The study also suggests scholarly writing and publication capacity-building initiatives that emphasise breaking down writing into small chunks, applying deadlines for each chunk, and offering rewards when an author meets the deadline.

Inadequate training in scholarly writing compounds these challenges, as many academics lack exposure to the specific skills required for scholarly writing and publication. This finding is consistent with research that revealed that the difficulties encountered by academics may stem from insufficient training in writing, let alone writing for publication (Belcher, 2009; Defianty & Hidayat, 2020a). This could be explained by the fact that most academics receive formal training in writing only while at the University, which primarily focuses on writing assignments rather than writing for publication.



Extrinsic barriers to female academics' scholarly writing and publication

The findings of this study confirm a constellation of extrinsic barriers that significantly hinder female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication, echoing trends observed globally. For instance, previous research points out that heavy workloads due to additional service and administrative duties, time constraints, and unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities limit female academics' time, energy, and focus on scholarly writing and publication, resulting in decreased research productivity, thus hindering opportunities for scholarly publication (Dubois-Shaik & Fusulier, 2017b; Lendák-Kabók, 2020; Scanlan & Still, 2013; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). Thus, it is not an overstatement to suggest that heavy workload in addition to heavy family responsibilities such as carrying the pregnancy for nine months, taking care of vulnerable babies, elderly parents, and other relatives from both the husband's family and the female academics' extended family as well as being a wife are not only physically draining but also robs female academics of the valuable time and energy to engage in focused research and scholarly writing. This study proposes strategies to alleviate the heavy workload and family responsibilities of female academics, ensuring they can dedicate sufficient time and effort to scholarly writing and publication, as their male counterparts do. These can include flexible work arrangements, workload redistribution, and providing resources and spaces for childcare support. These strategies could go a long way in creating a supportive and inclusive work environment that recognises and values work-life balance needs for female academics.

The lack of formalised mentorship structures continues to reinforce gender disparities in research productivity within academia, most especially among female academics because the findings revealed that the absence of experienced mentors deprived female academics of invaluable guidance, support, and role models in their academic journey which made developing their identity as researchers and negotiating the expectations and responsibilities of an academic daunting. The findings are consistent with the literature, which identifies a lack of mentorship and support structures as significant impediments to female academic staff's scholarly writing, publication, and career advancement (Cleary et al., 2023; Cross et al., 2019; DaLuz, 2022; Casad et al., 2021). These findings highlight the need for universities' top management to facilitate the establishment of formal mentorship programmes to connect early-career female academics with experienced mentors who can provide guidance and support, thereby increasing confidence in writing abilities and encouraging greater participation in scholarly activities. In addition, targeted strategies such as mentorship programmes and training initiatives are necessary to nurture scholarly writing and publication skills, confidence, and motivation among female academics, enabling them to contribute effectively to the literary discourse and enhance their research productivity. Mentorship is particularly important, as graduate training often does not adequately prepare new academics to balance research, teaching, and service commitments, making the transition to a professional career isolating, lonely, and stressful.

Limited collaboration and networking opportunities also emerged as a key constraint, as they were reported to reduce opportunities for co-authorship, interdisciplinary engagement, and visibility in scholarly communities. These bottlenecks cannot be ignored because networking opportunities have been reported to stimulate scholarly engagement, including knowledge exchange, collaboration, and co-authorship opportunities, thus enhancing women's visibility, research productivity, and publication outcomes (Ansmann et al., 2014; Kyvik & Reymert, 2017; Yang et al., 2022). These findings suggest an urgent need for female academics to establish discipline-specific and multidisciplinary communities of practice for fostering the sharing of knowledge and experiences, creating research partnerships for mutual support, and promoting collaboration and interdisciplinary research. This initiative will go a long way in harnessing the collective expertise and creativity of female academics,



leading to increased scholarly output and visibility of female academics within and outside the university.

Furthermore, a poorly resourced research environment, characterised by limited access to journals, research tools, internet connectivity, and adequate office space, further undermined female academics' scholarly engagement. These findings are consistent with research that revealed that academics experienced low research productivity due to poor working and research conditions, including shortages related to time provision for research, scholarly resources such as books for research, both national and international academic journals; research infrastructure offices, equipment, and laboratories; as well as research funding for projects, for conferences, for publications and services such as language support, statistical data analysis, space to write, good internet connectivity, and access to information resources (Defianty & Hidayat, 2020; Okoduwa et al., 2018). The paper points to the critical need for universities to prioritise the creation of an enabling research environment by investing in essential research infrastructure such as multimedia collaborative laboratories, ensuring the availability of well-equipped offices, and a functional academic writing centre which can provide services such as citation and reference management, language support, and statistical data analysis.

The lack of systematic research training also emerged as a salient barrier. While academic writing is often presumed to be an innate skill, many academics – particularly women – lack formal preparation for scholarly publication. This finding underscores a critical gap at Kyambogo University, where participants acknowledged that the Competitive Grant program lacks follow-up capacity-building in scholarly writing and publication for grant recipients. This observation aligns with Defianty and Hidayat (2020), whose research indicates that academics are often presumed to possess strong academic writing skills, with the assumption that writing for publication presents no substantial challenges, yet even experienced academics encounter barriers to publishing their research, primarily due to insufficient training in academic writing, particularly for publication. The findings highlight the importance of targeted training and capacity-building programmes, particularly for female academic staff, to enhance their research and scholarly writing skills. Capacity-building initiatives, such as writing retreats, workshops, and seminars on academic writing, manuscript preparation, manuscript writing, publication strategies, and navigating the publication process, could equip female academics with the knowledge and skills to transform research into publishable manuscripts, thereby bridging this gap.

Challenges related to long publication timelines and high article processing charges further limit female academics' participation in publishing. This finding is consistent with research conducted in Indonesia that reveals that publishing an article in a refereed journal involves a long and complicated process, including reading to write, selecting the journal to write for, planning what you have to say, contacting the editorial team, using the journal template for structuring the writing, preparing the final manuscript for publication, submitting the manuscript to the journal editor waiting if the article is accepted, a process which can take years before it is published in the journal (Defianty & Hidayat, 2020). This finding aligns with Page & Nyeboer's (2017) research, which reports dissatisfaction with the review process, particularly the time interval from submission to decision, which makes writing for publication challenging for female academics. A targeted publication support scheme, including subsidised fees and fast-track peer review options, could help address these systemic disadvantages.

The deep-seated gender biases continue to shape academic structures and decision-making spaces, thus hindering female academics' engagement in scholarly writing and publication. This finding is consistent with research that has revealed women are underrepresented on research boards and peer



review structures that allocate funding, are less likely to be journal editors and principal investigators, and receive fewer invitations to be keynote conference speakers (Teplitskiy (Teplitskiy et al., 2022; O'Connor, 2018). The study strongly advocates combating stereotypes about women in academia and involving female academics in policymaking to create an inclusive and gender-responsive research culture. This paper proposes that tackling these inequalities requires intentional efforts to diversify academic leadership and foster gender-responsive research policies. In addition, female academics should be at the forefront of challenging stereotypes about women in academia by proactively advocating for more representation that boards that make decisions which affect funding of scholarly writing and publication, engaging in the review of articles and establishing collaborations with high-impact journals, which could open avenues for affordable publication.

Conclusion

This study has advanced new understanding of persistent gender disparities in research productivity at Kyambogo University by uncovering how intersecting intrinsic and extrinsic barriers constrain female academics' engagement in scholarly publishing. While prior literature has documented gender gaps in academia, this research uniquely applies an intersectionality-informed framework to demonstrate how personal challenges—such as time constraints, self-doubt, and limited research skills—interact with structural impediments, including excessive workloads, inadequate mentorship, insufficient research infrastructure, limited funding, and systemic gender biases. Importantly, the study reveals that existing enabling factors, such as access to government research funding, postgraduate supervision opportunities, and academic journals, are necessary but insufficient to overcome these multilayered barriers without coordinated, systemic interventions.

Therefore, the study proposes a strategic, intersectionality-based institutional intervention: establishing a research support and Writing Centre, which is envisioned as a comprehensive hub providing structured academic support, capacity-building programmes, mentorship, and methodological assistance tailored to address the complex challenges faced by female academics. The study also underscored the importance of creating communities of practice to support peer mentoring, interdisciplinary collaboration, and knowledge sharing, alongside implementing institutional policies that ensure fair workload distribution, expanded mentorship opportunities, and targeted funding. While institutional reforms are essential, the study also emphasises the vital role of individual agency, encouraging female academics to actively address personal challenges and build scholarly confidence.

Future research is needed to evaluate the long-term impact of these interventions and peer networks in enhancing scholarly engagement. Additionally, comparative and intersectional analyses across disciplines and institutions. Such evidence will be vital for informing context-sensitive and equitable strategies to close the gender gap in research and publication.

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