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Lessons Learned From Academic Women Researchers Engaged in Training Needs Assessment for Developing Research and Publishing Skills

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Abstract: Despite progress made in recent years, women continue to be underrepresented in academic publishing. We aim to share insights from academic women researchers who participated in the Training Needs Assessment for developing their writing for publication skills in an Open Distance Learning institution in South Africa. The research questions that guided the study were: a) What specific challenges do academic women researchers face in developing research and publishing skills? b) What motivated academic women researchers to participate in a writing project? c) What type of support do academic women researchers identify as essential for advancing their research and publishing skills? The data were collected through an initial face-to-face meeting, followed by a Training Needs Assessment from eight purposively chosen participants in a case study design. The findings indicate participants' challenges of time constraints, lack of confidence, and knowledge as obstacles that hindered their publishing. Despite their challenges, women researchers reported their motivation to participate in the writing project for career advancement, personal development, academic recognition, and their inspiration to publish their research work. The study found that women researchers required writing support, peer collaboration, mentorship, and institutional support to improve their writing for publishing skills. Supporting academic women researchers with focused training, engaging them in collaborative networks, and developing gender-sensitive policies is crucial for promoting equity, breaking down barriers, and ensuring their academic and professional success.

Keywords: *Academic women researchers, empowerment, training needs assessment, writing for publication.*

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Introduction

Women's empowerment is crucial for achieving gender equality and is a central objective of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5. While this goal explicitly focuses on women's rights and empowerment, it is also integral to broader sustainable and inclusive development efforts (Odera & Mulusa, 2020; United Nations, 1998). Education is widely recognized as a key driver in empowering women, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to personal and societal progress (Safari, 2021).

However, significant challenges persist, particularly for women in academia. Research by Busse et al. (2022) reveals that female scholars often struggle with barriers in writing and publishing their work due to socio-economic and institutional constraints. Despite possessing the necessary qualifications and expertise, women researchers frequently face gender bias, limited access to resources, and weak professional support networks, all of which hinder their ability to produce and publish high-quality research (Khan et al., 2024; Safari, 2021).

Moreover, disparities in research output are evident between scholars from low- and middle-income countries and their counterparts in high-income nations. Busse et al. (2022) found that inadequate training in research writing, coupled with resource limitations, results in poorly structured manuscripts that struggle to meet publication standards. Compounding this issue, academic journals in resource-constrained settings often lack the financial and human resources to provide developmental support for promising but underdeveloped submissions.

Although Busse et al. (2022) did not specifically analyze gender disparities in their review of twenty manuscripts, they identified implicit barriers in the scientific publishing process. Requirements such as cover letters, strict adherence to

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author guidelines, and financial demands for open-access publication place additional burdens on researchers, particularly women who may lack access to mentors, funding, and reliable internet connectivity. These challenges highlight critical gaps in academic support systems, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to improve research writing and publishing opportunities for women researchers.

Women researchers often encounter limited institutional support, particularly in work-life balance programs, mentorship, and leadership development. The absence of strong role models, leadership training, and decision-making skills can hinder their confidence and make it more challenging to master academic writing and navigate the publishing process (Herbst, 2020; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). As a result, many women in academia experience frustration, anxiety, and restricted career progression opportunities (Hyland & Jiang, 2020). Poor writing skills can exacerbate these challenges, leading to career stagnation and a decline in motivation to improve academic writing. This lack of motivation may create a negative cycle, whereby inadequate writing skills may further limit opportunities for publication and professional advancement.

To address these barriers, scholars emphasize the need for specialized training in academic writing and effective communication strategies tailored to support women researchers (Nowell et al., 2020; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Additionally, Busse et al. (2022) highlight that capacity-building efforts in resource-constrained settings often overlook practical strategies for writing and publishing, underscoring the importance of evaluating and sharing insights into these approaches.

This gap in support justifies the need for targeted interventions, such as the women-in-research grant project implemented by an open distance learning (ODL) institution in South Africa. The project, designed to equip female academics with essential writing and publishing skills, was informed by a needs assessment that gathered insights from participants who voluntarily joined the initiative. By addressing these challenges, such programs can play a crucial role in fostering academic success and advancing gender equity in research.

Contextual Background

Rapid technological advancements have increased the demand for efficient employees with new skills that must be continually updated and refined. Open distance learning (ODL) environments, such as the one where this study was conducted, transform how individuals learn and develop by enabling virtual connections and interactions, whether in small or large groups. In these settings, participants often receive substantial amounts of information in a short period, requiring them to internalize, analyze, and apply it effectively to enhance their learning or performance based on their needs. However, we observed that some researchers may struggle to understand and utilize information delivered virtually, particularly regarding writing and publishing research findings in accredited journals. Furthermore, research highlights the lack of clear approaches to effectively support researchers in publishing their work in high-quality journals (Busse et al., 2022), compounded by structural barriers that often hinder researchers in low- and middle-income contexts from achieving publication success (Busse et al., 2022).

The "Women in Research" (Ngozwana, 2024) initiative was designed to create a more equitable publishing environment and promote gender equity in academia by addressing the unique challenges faced by women researchers. Its goal is to equip academic women researchers with the skills and knowledge necessary to overcome publishing obstacles while fostering a supportive environment that encourages collaboration, networking, and mentorship through an online platform on Microsoft Teams. The project began with an in-person meeting for participating women researchers, followed by the development of an online Training Needs Assessment (TNA) using Microsoft Forms to identify their specific needs before conducting online training sessions. The use of TNA ensured that the training was tailored to meet the professional development requirements of the participants, aligning with best practices for educational quality improvement (Ferreira & Abbad, 2013; Markaki et al., 2021). What distinguished this initiative from other women's empowerment programs was its reliance on data from the TNA to create a well-structured training plan, which was delivered virtually within an Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution in South Africa. The main research question addressed was: What are the perceptions of women researchers regarding their writing for publication needs, and how can Training Needs Assessment (TNA) be utilized to inform training and development efforts? The following sections include a literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and concluding remarks.

Literature Review

Challenges Faced by Academic Women Researchers in ODL Contexts

Women researchers, especially those in Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions, face numerous challenges that hinder their research productivity and career growth. Previous studies highlight gender-based inequalities, such as the unequal burden of caregiving responsibilities, which restrict women's ability to conduct research, advance professionally, and attain leadership roles (Dosunmu & Dichaba, 2024; Khan et al., 2024). However, these studies often overlook the compounded impact of institutional barriers, including unsupportive organizational cultures and inadequate resources, particularly in patriarchal settings (Blankert, 2024; Hassan, 2024; S. Khalid et al., 2024; Shrestha & Dangal, 2024). While publishing in academic journals is crucial for career progression, existing literature lacks sufficient exploration of the

structural obstacles that disproportionately hinder women from disseminating their research (Busse et al., 2022). Additionally, gaps remain in understanding the extent to which limited mentorship opportunities, gender biases in recruitment and promotion, and workplace discrimination exacerbate these challenges (Busse et al., 2022; Li et al., 2018; Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). Other constraints, such as family responsibilities and financial limitations, further restrict women's participation in research, yet existing studies often fail to address how these factors collectively shape their academic trajectories (Rostom, 2024).

Addressing these challenges is essential for creating a supportive environment that enhances women academics' research skills, participation, and performance, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of universities (S. Khalid et al., 2024). However, previous studies often overlook the deep-rooted institutional and cultural resistance that hinders the effectiveness of such initiatives, particularly the persistent lack of time and funding for training and development (Bin Othayman et al., 2022). While mentorship programs, collaborative research, and institutional support are widely acknowledged as key strategies for improving women's research productivity (K. Khalid & Parveen, 2024), existing literature does not sufficiently explore the practical barriers to implementing these solutions. Moreover, there is limited research on how institutional interventions can effectively support women researchers who lack scientific mentors to navigate the publication process (Busse et al., 2022). To bridge these gaps, Ferreira and Abbad (2013) propose a training needs assessment approach, yet further investigation is needed to determine how this framework can be adapted and effectively applied in professional education, research planning, and execution.

Training Needs Assessment (TNA)

Training Needs Assessment (TNA) plays a critical role in designing effective training programs tailored to the specific needs of individuals, teams, or organizations. Surface (2013) defines TNA as a structured approach that utilizes work analysis techniques to identify performance gaps and determine corresponding training needs. This process establishes learning objectives aimed at addressing deficiencies. Surface's (2013) perspective aligns with Brown's (2002) study, as both emphasize that TNA is a continuous data-driven process that ensures training initiatives align with organizational goals. Kraiger (2003) further elaborates that TNA identifies organizational needs and constraints, shaping instructional content while considering learner characteristics and attendance patterns. Additionally, Barbazette (2005) underscores the importance of assessing whether training is the appropriate solution for addressing performance shortcomings.

Sleezer et al. (2014) extend this discussion by defining needs assessment as a process for identifying and addressing learning or performance gaps. They highlight that a thorough TNA examines the current situation, pinpoints critical needs, and determines the necessary interventions to achieve desired outcomes, such as improved performance, skill development, or training initiatives. However, existing research does not fully explore how TNA can be effectively adapted to support specific groups, such as academic women researchers. By synthesizing insights from various scholars, we argue that a well-executed TNA should lead to measurable outcomes (e.g., increased research publications), improved processes (e.g., strategies for developing publishable manuscripts), and enhanced capacity (e.g., stronger research and writing skills).

The benefits of TNA are well-documented. Sava et al. (2024) conducted a study in higher education to examine institutional training needs, demonstrating how a well-structured TNA can inform specialized training programs and institutional training plans. Similarly, a systematic review by Markaki et al. (2021), which analyzed 33 studies on the healthcare workforce, found that TNA tools enable the creation of targeted training programs that address professional development needs. Despite these insights, there is still a gap in understanding how TNA can be systematically applied to prevent inefficiencies such as overtraining, undertraining, or misalignment with organizational objectives (Brown, 2002). Sleezer et al. (2014) emphasize that TNA not only identifies training needs but also fosters collaboration among stakeholders, ensuring that learning interventions are both relevant and impactful. Ultimately, TNA serves as a strategic tool for addressing organizational challenges, leveraging future opportunities, and delivering targeted training that enhances both individual and institutional performance.

Training Needs Analysis (TNA) is utilized across various organizations for diverse purposes, including professional development, performance evaluation, self-assessment, organizational analysis, and identifying individual or group training requirements. However, there is a notable lack of research specifically examining TNA in the context of women researchers engaged in academic publishing. Many universities fail to recognize TNA as a fundamental component of both the practical and strategic development of women researchers (Erasmus, 2020). Furthermore, existing studies do not provide a clear framework for how women researchers should conduct TNA, nor is there a consensus on how these assessments should be structured and aligned with institutional objectives (Matlakala, 2021).

To address training deficiencies, Barbazette (2005) proposed a three-step model involving information collection, analysis, and training plan development. This study applies Barbazette's framework to assess the training needs of academic women researchers, ensuring targeted support and addressing potential challenges. However, the broader academic discussion reveals a significant gap in empirical research and a lack of structured methodologies for identifying and meeting the specific training needs of women researchers seeking to enhance their publication output in higher

education institutions. This gap highlights an urgent need for further research and intervention to develop systematic, evidence-based approaches for supporting women in academic publishing.

Challenges of using TNA

While research has demonstrated several benefits of implementing Training Needs Analysis (TNA), various challenges have also been identified. Bin Othayman et al. (2022) conducted a TNA study in Saudi Arabian higher education and revealed several procedural, managerial, and systemic barriers. Their findings indicate that some institutions fail to prioritize TNA, resulting in ineffective implementation and a lack of clarity regarding institutional responsibilities. Moreover, they observed that when training needs are assessed solely through performance records, evaluations often become unreliable due to limited engagement, favoritism, nepotism, and personal biases among supervisors (Bin Othayman et al., 2022). These concerns are consistent with Ludwikowska's (2018) argument that training decisions are frequently influenced by individual preferences rather than actual organizational needs. Despite these challenges, conducting a thorough needs assessment before implementing training initiatives remains essential, as it enhances the likelihood of success and prevents costly errors (Sleezer et al., 2014). This underscores the importance of adopting objective, systematic approaches to TNA to ensure that training interventions are both relevant and effective.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research approach, using a case study design. A case study entails a thorough examination of a single entity, such as an institution, program, event, or group, serving as the subject of the investigation (Rakotsoane, 2019). In this case, the focus was on a group of eight academic women researchers. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of a specific group or context, providing useful insights for developing focused solutions.

Sample and Data Collection

The study included eight participants who were purposively selected as members of a women-in-research project. The participants were chosen based on specific criteria to ensure their relevance and suitability for the study's objectives. The selection criteria, outlined in the research grant application, was a university call for permanent academic women researchers who were interested and qualified to become principal investigators to conduct a three-year study for a specific target group. Consequently, the required participants were to be (a) permanent academics, (b) recent graduates, (c) emerging researchers learning to publish, and (d) willing to join the project. All eight participants were colleagues from the same department and were personally invited to participate by the principal researcher for the women-in-research grant. The chosen limited number was affected by the amount of funding received for the project, which could not cater for more people. Choosing participants from the same department promoted collaboration and highlighted common challenges and experiences among academic women researchers.

Data collection followed a qualitative approach, beginning with an in-person meeting on the university campus in November 2023. During this session, the project's objectives, plans, and activity timelines were introduced. Participants were advised to check their emails for a Training Needs Assessment (TNA) Form, which aimed to gather information about their training needs.

The day after the meeting, the Principal Investigator created an online TNA using Microsoft Forms. This form was distributed via email in November 2023 for participants to complete online. The TNA consisted of twelve semi-structured, open-ended questions, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts. Upon completing the form, participants were required to click the submit button, which automatically sent their responses to the inboxes of both the Principal and Co-Principal Researchers. This setup enabled them to receive notifications of submissions and independently analyze the training needs.

Analyzing of Data

Data analysis followed the inductive thematic approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), emphasizing the identification of patterns and themes relevant to the research questions. After independently analyzing the data, both researchers met for a full day in January 2024 to conduct a joint analysis. The process began with familiarization with the data, where key ideas and recurring patterns from the TNA Microsoft Forms submitted by the eight participants were noted. Next, initial codes were generated by systematically reviewing the data and highlighting meaningful sections, a step that required extended discussions before reaching a consensus. The codes were then grouped into broader categories, and themes were refined, merged, or discarded if they lacked sufficient supporting data. To ensure that the final themes were coherent, distinct, and accurately represented the data, a thorough review was conducted. An audit trail was maintained to document the coding process and theme development before compiling the final report.

To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms (Anne, Busy, Cassy, Debra, Dyke, Lilly, Mary, and Thelma) were used. Ethical standards, including anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, and informed consent, were strictly followed to ensure

participant trust and protection. The study received ethical approval (Ref: 2023/05/10/90318331/13/AM) from an Open Distance Learning (ODL) institution in South Africa, demonstrating compliance with academic and institutional research standards while enhancing the study's credibility.

Findings/Results

The training needs analysis of the information gathered from the eight academic women researchers revealed the following themes: challenges, motivation, and support, which they identified as areas where they needed assistance. These themes will be supported by direct quotations to illustrate the actual responses from various participants. The first theme, challenges, directly addresses the first research question and is presented below.

Theme 1: Challenges

When asked about specific challenges preventing them from writing and publishing academic papers, participants cited various obstacles, including time limitations, lack of confidence, and lack of knowledge.

Time constraints

Anne shared her struggle with time constraints, highlighting the long turnaround times of journals for feedback, difficulties with language editing, and the absence of critical readers for her research. Cassy, on the other hand, viewed time restrictions differently, explaining that *"Balancing research, teaching and learning, academic or administrative duties, and personal responsibilities limits the time available for writing."* For Cassy, this meant that academic women researchers often find themselves torn between their academic duties and family commitments.

Lack of confidence

Another challenge, lack of confidence, was expressed by Busy, who said, *"It will be my first time writing and publishing my research findings, so I need proper guidance."* This reflects Busy's self-doubt, as she faced the daunting task of academic writing and publishing for the first time, potentially impacting her perception of her work's value. Dyke echoed this sentiment, also expressing the need for support, as she voiced her concerns.

I'm not confident, I need guidance on selecting appropriate research design and methodologies for different types of research questions ... I find it difficult to navigate the journal submission guidelines and address the peer-review comments (Dyke).

On a similar issue

I want to know how to find suitable journals and how to respond to feedback coming from the journals. I also need to understand ethical considerations and the implications of research designs, as well as the interpretation of empirical data (Thelma).

It seems the lack of confidence was aligned with women not knowing what to do when faced with the data, which shows the lack of knowledge.

Lack of knowledge

Lilly raised an important issue when she shared, *"In my recent research project, I have a lot of data, making it difficult to choose the relevant information for my first research paper."* Debra said, *"It is difficult for me to analyze and interpret the data, I don't know how and what to do"* while Mary remarked:

Research is a challenge for me in every aspect. I need proper guidance on everything, from writing an abstract and developing an introduction to crafting a conclusion. I also need help selecting the right research designs and methodologies for different types of research questions, as well as understanding the ethical considerations and implications of research design (Mary).

It is evident that some challenges highlight the limited opportunities for emerging academic staff to collaborate with established and experienced researchers. This suggests a lack of education in writing, thereby failing to sufficiently support academic women researchers. A lack of education may affect their motivation to publish papers in accredited journals, which is a requirement by the university. However, women researchers were devoted to overcoming their challenges, hence their willingness to engage in the writing project.

Theme 2: Motivation to participate in the writing project.

One of the questions posed was: What are the main reasons that drive you to improve your research writing and publishing skills? Women academic researchers shared a few insights into their motivation for participating in the project designed to support their publishing efforts. Nearly all of them (six out of eight) identified career advancement and academic recognition as key motivators. Busy explained, *"I participate because it is crucial for my growth and career*

progression." Lilly echoed this sentiment, saying, *"I do it for career advancement."* Mary stated, *"Publishing is often viewed as a key factor for promotion and recognition in academia."* Similarly, Debra reported, *"Publishing is an academic necessity. Additionally, it will encourage my personal development."* Thelma noted, *"This serves both as a means of advancement and fulfilling an academic requirement."* Dyke added, *"I want my work published in respected journals, as it will inspire me to write even more papers."* It can be noted that these women are motivated to contribute to academic discussions through publishing, seeking recognition while continuing their academic growth. What they require is adequate support to write for publication, enhance their expertise, and tackle issues they are passionate about.

Theme 3: Support

Another question posed was for women researchers to indicate their support needs regarding how to write and publish their research work. This theme highlighted the need for writing support, peer collaboration, mentorship, and institutional support.

Writing support

Busy suggested that it would be beneficial to meet periodically for writing and publishing activities. In her words:

I would appreciate it if we could have writing retreats or set aside time away from other responsibilities to focus solely on manuscript writing in a peaceful environment (Busy).

In a similar vein, Anne expressed herself, *"I would like us to be supported as group where we hold regular meetings with other academics in the department and be workshopped on how to write."* Thelma emphasized that, *"We need writing workshops or training sessions that can focus on various aspects of writing, such as research methodology and publishing strategies for different journals."* The support that women researchers need could go a long way to assist them as a group and promote collaborative efforts.

Peer collaboration

For peer collaboration Cassy mentioned:

I need help in selecting the right journal for my paper and understanding the editors' guidelines... I would be happy to have opportunities for collaboration with colleagues or experienced mentors who can guide us through the publishing process (Cassy).

In contrast, Lilly stated, *"I know about the writing process and can share the experiences I have. I just need to understand the publishing strategies."* Lilly's comment is significant because it highlights the potential for creating communities of practice or learning networks among academic women who are eager to learn. This suggests the need to form a team that provides a space for group writing, where women academic researchers can openly share experiences, challenges, offer feedback, and celebrate their successes in writing for publication. This could open the possibility for mentorship.

Mentorship

Mentorship was mentioned as another support mechanism that could assist academic women who lack the writing and publishing skills if they could work closely with more experienced academic staff. Busy indicated:

I wish the university could pair early-career female scholars with experienced faculty members to provide guidance on manuscript preparation, journal selection, and navigating the peer-review process (Busy).

Dyke puts it directly, *"The university should provide a structured mentorship programme where we can be guided on the writing process until we publish our work."* Mary suggested another issue, *"Our institution should establish a writing space, free from interruptions, as that would encourage a culture of publication among female academics."* This means that a safe space for writing with mentors or individually could possibly allow women to engage fully in the writing for publication, provided the institution could support the idea.

Institutional support

Lilly advocated for institutional support by stating that:

To enhance our visibility, I would suggest the creation of institutional grants dedicated for academic writing and publication for interested academics. We should not apply but be supported regularly. The university should allow us to access professional editing services, provide journal submission fees, and hold writing retreats to enable female scholars to contribute more effectively to high-impact publications (Lilly).

This shows the need for grant support that can promote robust writing among women researchers. Anne stated,

The university should allow for the balancing of teaching, administrative duties, and scholarly writing, by putting aside the specified writing time within our workloads... we are expected to write and publish, but there's no time allocated for this (Anne).

This underscores the importance of advocating for flexible institutional policies that can support academic women in mentorship and collaborative support, time allocation, funding, and the creation of writing support spaces.

Discussion

The study aimed to offer insights from academic women researchers involved in a training needs assessment, designed to prepare them for developing their writing and publishing skills at an ODL institution. The findings highlight three major challenges that academic women researchers face when it comes to writing and publishing papers in accredited journals. Firstly, academic women researchers experienced the challenge of balancing work with personal time. This means that women researchers struggled to allocate sufficient time for academic writing because of competing responsibilities. This finding affirms what Bin Othayman et al. (2022) found in their study pertaining to time constraint that affects training and development and could extend to competing family commitments that women are likely to have (Rostom, 2024). Women often juggle multiple roles, such as teaching, supervising students, performing administrative duties, and personal or family responsibilities.

In addition, women researchers faced time constraints due to journal turnaround time, which refers to the delay in receiving feedback from academic journals after submitting a paper. This is because the review and revision process in academic publishing can be lengthy, sometimes taking months or even years. This finding concurs with previous studies regarding time demands, lack of role models and mentors to guide women through the publication process (Busse et al., 2022; Herbst, 2020; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). As a result, some women get frustrated by writing and navigating the difficult and lengthy publishing process with likelihood to end up producing poorly written papers (Busse et al., 2022; Hyland & Jiang, 2020). Therefore, for women researchers who already struggle with limited time for writing, this delay can discourage them or disrupt their workflow, further affecting their ability to publish regularly. The implication is that inability to find dedicated time for research and writing slows down their productivity and hinders their chances of publishing in reputable journals.

Secondly, the findings illustrated the lack of confidence by women researchers, meaning that women may doubt their writing abilities, research contributions, or the quality of their research work. This finding confirms what Herbst (2020) found about the lack of skills that may affect confidence as well as navigating the publishing process. Academic women researchers might fear rejection from journals or criticism from peer reviewers, which can discourage them from submitting papers. This self-doubt could be linked to imposter syndrome, where they feel they are not "good enough" compared to their peers. Thirdly, the findings revealed the lack of knowledge by women researchers. This means women may not be fully familiar with the process of academic writing and publishing, such as structuring a manuscript, selecting the right journal, responding to reviewers' comments, or navigating the peer-review system. This is upholding findings by Busse et al. (2022) and Yousaf and Schmiede (2017). Women researchers might not have received adequate mentorship or training in research writing, which can make it harder for them to publish in accredited journals. Surprisingly, these challenges can significantly hinder their academic progress, making it more difficult for them to establish themselves as published researchers.

It was found that academic women researchers were motivated to participate in the writing for publication project. This finding suggests that academic women researchers recognize the importance of publishing and showed eagerness to overcome barriers to achieve success in their careers. This finding contrasts with previous research suggesting that women often face limited career progression despite their publishing efforts (Hyland & Jiang, 2020), due to systemic barriers hindering their advancement (S. Khalid et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2024). These women see academic writing and publishing as essential for career growth, promotions, and securing better opportunities in academia. Moreover, academic women seemed to want to gain credibility and visibility in their field by contributing to scholarly knowledge. This is because being a published researcher enhances their reputation among peers, institutions, and the broader academic community.

It is interesting to note that despite the challenges women face in the academic publishing process, they require structured support to succeed. The findings revealed that academic women researchers require writing support and resources such as writing workshops, editing services, or structured writing programs to improve their academic writing skills. Academic women may benefit from guidance on structuring research papers, improving clarity, and meeting journal requirements. These results are consistent with Vilhena et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of capacity-building and equality initiatives for women pursuing publication to advance professionally. The findings also align with the broader concept of empowering women and offering the necessary support in academic settings (Nowell et al., 2020; Odera & Mulusa, 2020; Safari, 2021; United Nations, 1998; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Consequently, it was found that academic women aspire to peer collaboration. Women need opportunities to work with colleagues to exchange ideas, review each other's work, and co-author papers. Collaborative writing can boost confidence, provide constructive

feedback, and create a supportive academic environment. This finding reinforces previous research (Blankert, 2024; Hassan, 2024; Shrestha & Dangal, 2024) regarding the importance of peer learning initiatives among academic members.

The study found that academic women require mentorship support as it can provide encouragement, career guidance, and help them navigate academic challenges. Mentorship is where experienced researchers or senior academics can help guide women through the publication process, offering advice on selecting journals, responding to reviewer feedback, and refining their work. This finding agrees with what researchers found about the lack of mentors and role models to support academic women researchers (Busse et al., 2022; K. Khalid & Parveen, 2024; Li et al., 2018; Thelma & Ngulube, 2024; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017).

It was discovered that academic women researchers require institutional support in the form of access to research funding, journal subscriptions, and administrative assistance, which can also help women researchers focus on writing and publishing. This finding supports research by Hassan (2024), K. Khalid and Parveen (2024) about institutional barriers, along with inadequate resources to support the writing for publication initiatives by academic women researchers. This implies that universities and research institutions need to provide policies, funding, writing retreats, and reduced teaching loads to create an environment that fosters research and publication for academic women. Consequently, institutions should establish training programs like TNA (Barbazette, 2005; Ludwikowska, 2018; Markaki et al., 2021; Sleezer et al., 2014), where relevant interventions focus on journal selection and equip women researchers with the skills to identify accredited journals. This finding underscores Brown's (2002) research on the training needs for academic women researchers to avoid the risks of publishing in predatory journals.

Conclusion

The study underscores the importance of conducting TNA before implementing targeted training interventions to support and empower academic women researchers in their academic writing and professional publishing journeys. The findings of this study highlight the multifaceted challenges that academic women researchers face in writing and publishing papers in accredited journals. These challenges include time constraints, difficulties in balancing work and personal responsibilities, lack of confidence, and limited knowledge of academic writing and publishing processes. Additionally, the study reveals that long journal turnaround times further hinder their ability to publish consistently.

Despite these obstacles, the study also identifies strong motivational factors that drive academic women researchers to engage in academic writing, such as career development, academic recognition, personal growth, and the aspiration to publish their work. To overcome these barriers and support their scholarly productivity, academic women researchers require structured writing support, peer collaboration, mentorship, and institutional backing.

This study contributes new insights by emphasizing the interplay between personal, institutional, and structural barriers that affect academic women researchers' ability to publish. Unlike previous studies that focused solely on gender disparities in academia, this research underscores the need for targeted interventions such as mentorship programs, institutional policies that provide dedicated writing time, and collaborative writing networks. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of reducing journal turnaround times and enhancing confidence-building initiatives to empower academic women in research and publishing.

Recommendations

This study presents several key recommendations to support academic women researchers. First, universities, research offices, and professional development centers should conduct regular needs assessments to design targeted training programs. These programs should equip academic women researchers with the skills to identify reputable journals and avoid predatory publishing. Additionally, institutions should implement structured writing initiatives such as writing retreats, workshops, and dedicated research time to enhance academic writing and publication success.

Second, academic institutions and faculty research development committees should establish formal peer learning initiatives that provide collaborative platforms for academic women researchers. These networks should foster knowledge exchange, mutual support, and problem-solving, while also promoting career growth and equitable access to academic opportunities.

Third, universities should develop mentorship programs where experienced researchers guide early-career women academics through the writing and publishing process. Encouraging collaborative writing groups will further support women researchers by allowing them to co-author papers, receive constructive feedback, and build confidence in publishing. Additionally, institutions should offer editing services, writing coaches, and peer review groups to help researchers refine their manuscripts.

To ensure sustainable impact, policies should include mechanisms to monitor and address systemic barriers, aligning institutional support with the specific needs of academic women researchers. By implementing focused training, collaborative networks, and gender-responsive policies, universities can promote equity, eliminate structural challenges, and foster the academic and professional success of women researchers. Future research should assess the long-term impact of institutional writing support programs on women's publication rates.

Limitations

While the findings contribute to the existing literature on academic women researchers' perceptions of writing for publication, there are certain limitations to consider. The study's main constraints are its small sample size and the specific study area, which restrict the generalizability of the results to all ODL institutions in South Africa. However, similar trends may be observed in other contexts. Additionally, the study relied exclusively on qualitative methods using TNA with a narrow focus, indicating that future research could benefit from using alternative methods on a broader scale.

Ethics Statements

This study was conducted in line with the Declaration of Helsinki and received ethical clearance approval (Ref: 2023/05/10/90318331/13/AM) from the ethics committee at the University of South Africa. The eight participants gave their written informed consent to take part in the study.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Generative AI Statement

As the authors of this work, we utilized the AI tool [Quill Bot] for the purpose of [paraphrasing]. After using this tool, we thoroughly reviewed and verified the final version of our work. We, as the author(s), take full responsibility for the content of the published work.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Ngozwana: Conceptualization, design, analysis, writing. Dichaba: Data analysis, supervision, editing/reviewing.

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