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# Social capital and career advancement of female academic staff in Nigerian universities

Female academic staff in Nigerian universities

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to examine the social capital factors of career advancement of female academic staff in Nigerian universities.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A measurement and structural analysis were conducted for the three independent variables and a dependent variable on 20 public universities. Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. The dependent variable was female academic staff career advancement and the independent variables were mentoring, networking and government machinery. Using stratified random sampling, 532 academic staff were selected as the study respondents. They represented sampling criteria such as federal and state universities.

**Findings** – Structural modeling analysis showed that social capital variables, specifically mentoring, networking and government machinery variables, were significant contributors to the career advancement of the female academic staff in Nigerian universities.

**Practical implications** – This study creates an insight into the knowledge of career advancement among female academic staff in public universities. These institutions dominate the university system in Nigeria and serve as the main avenue for university education in the country. At the level of higher institution, HRD is significant, particularly in creating awareness among academic staff about their career planning and aspirations, the role that the perceived environmental factors play in their advancement to higher positions in the university and how they should further utilize those factors.

**Originality/value** – The paper examines social capital factors (limited to mentoring, networking and government machinery) that are of concern to managing the career advancement of female academic staff in public universities.

**Keywords** Mentoring, Networking, Career advancement, Female academic staff, Government machinery, Nigerian universities

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

In this contemporary world, human resources are considered most valuable assets for any organization (Snell *et al.*, 2015; Mahoney and Kor, 2015). Thus, institutions must accept to utilize their worker's diversity and career advancement processes and practices. Such strategies are even more important in the higher education sector because of the roles that universities play in supporting socioeconomic and political development. However, such process, strategies and practice are questionable and were challenged in the higher education sector of many nations including Europe and Africa. In several cases, entrance and development of workers into formal organizations are imbalanced and lopsided for men over women.

In Nigeria, there is a low percentage of representation of female academic staff in the higher institutions of learning and a poor representation of women in the more senior positions as management staff and principal officers in the universities (Yusuff, 2014). For instance, the "needs assessment of Nigerian education sector" shows that there are only



6,376 (17 percent) female academic staff out of the total number of 37,504 in the universities, whereas in the polytechnic there are 915 (16 percent) females out of 4,721 polytechnic lecturers, and in the colleges of education only 3,688 (24 percent) females out of 11,656 total female academic staff (International Organization for Migration, 2014). Moreover, the academicians employed in these institutions are lacking promotion to higher cadres of career (Duyilemi, 2007; Hassan *et al.*, 2016; Olabisi, 2014; Yusuff, 2014). Nonetheless, teaching is one of the suitable professions for female gender because of their nurturing, modest and compassionate nature (Hofstede, 2011) and hence, the female will be better off in providing higher productivity in the advanced institutions of learning if given opportunity, particularly in the higher positions.

At the beginning of career studies, the emphasis was on how women got entry and were accepted in an organization; now it is how they can grow to become leaders in their field of endeavors (Burke, 2006; McElroy and Weng, 2016). Therefore, to achieve the development of females into a higher position in their career, Lin and Huang (2005) argued that social capital factor serves as a mechanism for achieving career advancement. Metz and Tharenou (2001) further buttressed that social capital is a viable tool for career advancement at the higher level. Therefore, social capital stimulates career advancement through mentoring, networking and government machinery or support (Gbereubie *et al.*, 2014; Patwardhan *et al.*, 2015). These scholars submitted that the utilization of these social capital factors will stimulate the potentials and subsequently lead to female career advancement. Social capital is the ability of workers to secure benefits by membership in social structures. These social structures promote valuable relationships between and among individuals and extend further to the position an individual occupies in the organization. Therefore, this study aims to examine the social capital factors of career advancement in the Nigerian universities.

### Literature reviews and hypotheses

In relations to social capital theory and the framework of this study, related and previous relevant studies were reviewed on mentoring, networking and government machinery.

#### Mentoring

Preceding studies on career advancement revealed that mentoring is an important variable in explaining female career advancement. Jones and Brown (2011) and Kalpazidou Schmidt and Faber (2016) claimed that mentoring has a mutual and positive relationship between mentees and mentors that stimulate career advancement. Supporting this assertion, Parsa *et al.* (2016) indicated that mentoring had a positive and significant relationship with career advancement among academic staff in Iran. Thus, mentoring can be utilized as a mechanism for career advancement (Parsa *et al.*, 2016). Similarly, Phitayakorn *et al.* (2016) argued that mentoring is an important factor for promotion and career plan. Relatedly, Scandura and Williams (2001) argued that mentoring is a predictor of career advancement. Furthermore, mentoring was found to be significant to women's career advancement (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015; Patwardhan *et al.*, 2015). Mentoring was also found to be predicting career success and has a broader meaning which encompasses both intrinsic and extrinsic career success (Bozionelos, 2006; Sanford *et al.*, 2015). In the same trends, Searby *et al.* (2015) affirmed that mentoring influences female career development in the higher education sector through coaching, sponsorship and counselor. Admittedly, Levine *et al.* (2013) further stressed that mentorship and its acceptability were established on the ground of trust, personal conditions and shared values irrespective of either intra-gender or inter-gender mentoring relationship.

In the same manner, Varkey *et al.* (2012) summoned that lack of mentoring to female academic staff affect their career advancement and productivity. Blood *et al.* (2012) supported the assertion that lack of mentoring is a hindrance to women's career

advancement. In line with the above argument, mentoring can be measured as a constellation of vocational support, role modeling and psycho-social support. Parsa *et al.* (2016) further indicate that career advancement was related to promotion growth, career goal progress, pay growth and professional ability development. Furthermore, Kalpazidou Schmidt and Faber (2016) stressed that mentoring development indicated that both mentee and mentor benefit from the relationships; mentee benefits from guidance on career planning, moral support and competence awareness, whereas mentor reciprocally benefits from institutional recognition, professional development and personal satisfaction. Nevertheless, Seraj *et al.* (2015) further revealed that mentoring and its availability and accessibility to mentee can lead to career advancement. Thus, due to the contextual difference among countries (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015; Patwardhan *et al.*, 2015; Varkey *et al.*, 2012; Parsa *et al.*, 2016; Seraj *et al.*, 2015), there is a need to re-examine mentoring and its effect in the Nigerian context. Hence, this study assumes a beneficial outcome of mentoring on career advancement based on the hypothesis below:

- H1. There is a positive relationship between mentoring and career advancement of female academic staff.

### Networking

Networking is a technique that fetches information, opportunities and resources from within and outside the organization. It as well enhances a person's career from the angle of compensation and promotion through partaking in a tangible assignment (Wellington and Catalyst, 2001). Dougherty and Forret (2004) and Durbin and Tomlinson (2010) found that mutual relationship between a junior and superior that provides potent career assistance is a vital technique for career advancement. Networking is built to develop and promote opportunities to higher level positions in a career in an organization through the sharing of advice and support about employees' career (McCarthy, 2004 in Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010; Ismail and Rasdi, 2007). Hence, networking is a factor of career advancement. In this regard, Warner *et al.* (2016) found a positive relationship between network reach and author publication in a high impact journal. It is a well-known fact that publication of articles in the reputable journal is a requirement for academic promotion and career advancement. In a related development, Huang (2016) found that maintaining the network such as of sustaining contacts and partaking in professional activities was significantly related to positive career outcome such as promotion. This outcome is an indicator of career advancement of employees. Furthermore, social networks were identified as tools to gain new knowledge, means of referrals, channels of information and avenue for socialization. Arokiasamy *et al.* (2011) found networking to be positively and significantly related to career advancement among female academicians in Malaysian private universities with career advancement indicated by a positive change in promotion, salary, goal achievement, learning and prospect. However, Linehan (2001) stressed that lack of networking or poor networking could negatively affect career advancement of female employees. In this sense, networking is a positive tool for aiding career progression among employees (Seibert *et al.*, 2001; Singh *et al.*, 2006). Nonetheless, networking can be understood from two perspectives of formal and informal networking. The former is a structural relationship among employees based on professional guidelines in which they share professional knowledge and career-related matters. On the other hand, informal networking is designed based on the conscious and social gains (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010).

However, Bozionelos and Wang (2006) opined that there was a limited relationship between the capital of networking for career success among Chinese white collar employees. This finding is contradictory to many previous studies, particularly those conducted in an Anglo-Saxon context. The present finding of Chinese is largely due to the cultural

characteristics of Chinese society. Therefore, there could be cultural differences in the Nigerian context too, and so the study hypothesized a positive relationship between networking and career advancement. Similarly, Linehan and Scullion (2008) qualitatively approached networking phenomenon among women and found that difficulty in access to networking by females had been a hindrance to a woman's level of socializing in the organization. Nonetheless, it would be more fruitful to have exclusive female networks in organizations. This type of network is proven and promotes an avenue to prosper among themselves by having information and advice about their careers (Pini *et al.*, 2004). Nevertheless, Cheung *et al.* (2016) lamented that network development – be it exclusive or inclusive – influences career advancement. Therefore, following the submissions of numerous scholars discussed above, this study formulated a directional hypothesis below:

*H2.* There is a positive relationship between networking and career advancement of female academic staff.

### **Government machinery support**

According to Women Watch, United Nations (2007) human resource department, such as women affairs department of every nation, has a role to play in attracting women to leadership tasks and positions through necessary support such as affirmative action like quotas. Following this call, Cho and Kwon (2010) stressed that advanced and non-advanced countries attempted to promote gender equality through various policies and program such affirmative action, sensitization and re-orientation about employees and employers relationship. However, Korean authorities have developed such policies and laws to reduce gender inequality, but the implementation of those laws and policies remains a mirage (Cho and Kwon, 2010). Nonetheless, government machinery continues the fight for transparent processes of recruitment, promotion and leadership advancement, creating awareness within institutions and the country at large on the potentials of women and their capacities so as to eliminate gender stereotypes in the society.

However, there is discrimination on career opportunity for women; ineffective policies and programs for women's leadership were among the potential barriers to women's career advancement to the higher positions of authority around the world (Mathur-Helm, 2005). On the basis of these hitherto challenges for female folks, United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women contemplated that formal organizations are supposed to have an active role in organizing solidarity for females through education, information and sensitization activities. Taking this leap, in 2001, National Women Empowerment Policy in India was established with the aims of empowerment and eradication of all types of discrimination against females and a reservation of 33 percent of government positions to females' in the country as affirmative action (Shankar, 2016). Sharma and Dhal (2016) further argued that the policy was specifically aimed to strengthen and to ensure greater participation, awareness, participation, motivation and skill development. Fortunately, the policy had created a significant and positives changes to female access to science education and overall career (Sharma and Dhal, 2016).

Similarly, Nigerian government proposed the implementation of 35 percent reservation of positions to female gender based on the national gender policy for women through affirmative action or quota (Daily Post, 2015). This was done to empower women in their quest for career advancement in Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) was established in 1995 and upgraded in 1989 in response to the UN agreement to have an institutional mechanism for women matters and advancement (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2013). The activities of the ministry were supported by some pet agencies that aimed at women's development (Ovute *et al.*, 2015). The Ministry of Women Affairs was created in adherence to the UN

agreement on a quest to establish an institutional mechanism for women matters and advancement (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2013). The government support policy creates a resilience that induces diversified career patterns (van der Kaap and de Weert, 2016). Lane *et al.* (2016) opined that career advancement needs a systematic support of organizations. Therefore, this study expects a positive result as hypothesized below:

- H3. There is a positive relationship between government machinery support through Ministry of Women of Affairs and career advancement of female academic staff.

## Research method

### *Sampling and data collection procedure*

This study adopted a quantitative approach as its methods of data collection and analysis. Closed-ended questionnaires were self-administered by female academic staff in measuring career advancement, mentoring, networking and government support. Stratified sampling was adopted in selecting 532 female academic staff from ten federal and ten state public universities. However, after data screening, 368 questionnaires were found suitable for analysis from the 377 returned surveys. Similarly, Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used for data screening and demographic analysis, whereas structural equation modeling – partial least square was employed in the data analysis through measurement and structural modeling due to its suitability in running all the paths simultaneously (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

### *Instrument*

In this research, responses to the measurement instrument were based on a five-point Likert scale. The measurement scales ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Similarly, content validity was carried out through verification of the instrument items and structure by some experts in the field of career advancement in particular and human resource management and public administration in general. Amendment of the original instrument was made based on expert observations to suit the context and purpose of the study. Moreover, measurement validity was examined and found appropriate based on discriminant validity as reported in Table IV. Furthermore, reliabilities of the measures were tested during a pilot study on 53 respondents and on 368 responses during the main study. The reliability of statements on both studies found that all groups of items were beyond the acceptable minimum Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  threshold of 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2006) as reported in Table I. Accordingly, Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.60 is averagely reliable, but Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of 0.70 and above was considered as highly reliable (Nunnally, 1978; Hair *et al.*, 2006; Sekaran and Bourgie, 2013). Furthermore, the questionnaire was divided into five components, such as demographics, mentoring, networking, government machinery support and career advancement of female academic staff. The demography was included to establish the background of the study respondents.

*Demographics.* This part consists of inquiries about respondent marital status, age, level of education and ranks (Tharenou *et al.*, 1994; Metz and Tharenou, 2001). These questions were asked to appreciate the background information of the respondents.

*Mentoring.* Five items were adapted from Patwardhan *et al.* (2016) as used by Scandura and Ragins (1993) to test the relationship between mentoring and career advancement. Examples of these items are “Female academic staff is given coaching by their mentor on how to finish tasks within the deadline that otherwise would have been difficult to complete” and “Female academic staff try to model their behavior on their mentor.”

*Networking.* This variable was measured with four adapted items from Patwardhan *et al.* (2016) as used in Noe (1988) in determining the relationship between networking and

Variables	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Career advancement	CA1	0.8718	0.761	0.957	0.9476
	CA2	0.8549			
	CA3	0.8722			
	CA4	0.8657			
	CA5	0.8974			
	CA6	0.8599			
	CA7	0.8835			
Mentoring	MT1	0.6706	0.663	0.907	0.8738
	MT2	0.875			
	MT3	0.8948			
	MT4	0.7904			
	MT5	0.822			
Government machinery support (MoWA)	GM1	0.9919	0.763	0.9412	0.9208
	GM2	0.8223			
	GM3	0.8654			
	GM4	0.8495			
	GM5	0.8269			
Networking	NT1	0.869	0.769	0.93	0.8999
	NT2	0.8597			
	NT3	0.9032			
	NT4	0.8745			

**Table I.**  
Loadings, AVE, CR,  
Cronbach's  $\alpha$

**Notes:** AVE, average variance extracted; CR, composite reliability

career advancement. Examples of questions used in this study are "Conversation and collaborations played a major role in female academic staff career advancement" and "Female academic staff has established good contacts through networking with others to advance in my career."

*Government machinery support.* This variable and its group of items consisted of five questions that were formulated by research based on the review of the literature (Adusah-Karikari and Ohemeng, 2014) and adapted to study local context since government machinery supports are context specific. Among items used are "Government machinery through Ministry of Women Affairs raises awareness and encourages active participation of women in challenging tasks of their career" and "Government machinery through Ministry of Women Affairs sponsored training on sensitization programs on the women's career development."

*Career advancement.* This part used seven items from the work of Metz and Tharenou (2001) and Arokiasamy *et al.* (2011) in measuring career advancement. Examples of statement used for this construct are "Female academic staff received a promotion to the next higher level in their career in this university" and "Female academic staff salary is appropriately increasing higher." Last, since the questionnaire items were collected from different sources, this exploratory factor analysis was performed (as reported in Table AI) through an extraction method of principal component and rotation method of Varimax with Kaiser Normalization to validate the rotated matrix of the groups of items.

## Analysis of results

### Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the study respondents were marital status, age bracket, the level of education and their current ranks in the university. Specifically, the majority of the respondents (72 percent) were married, followed by single (17.7 percent), widow (5.4 percent) and divorce (4.1 percent). Their age bracket was between 18 and 60 years,



while the level of education ranges from a bachelor's degree (9.8 percent), masters (57.9 percent) to PhD (32.3 percent). Finally, their ranks were between lecturer (88.5 percent), associate professor (2.2 percent) and professor (1.1 percent).

### *Measurement model*

The analysis in Table I presents the results of items loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  so as to determine the internal consistency of the model. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  achieved the lowest of 0.8738 and the highest of 0.9476 of the variables and their items in the study (Figure 1).

While Table II shows that multicollinearity is not a concern among the exogenous latent variables as all variables condition index were less than 0.30, VIF values were less than 5 and tolerance values were more than 0.20 as recommended (Hair *et al.*, 2011). Hence, this study is free from multicollinearity problem. Therefore, the model is fit for structural analysis.

### *Discriminant validity*

Discriminant validity is a requirement to ascertain the viability of a model through the evaluation of the square root of the AVE. Tables II and III present the results of the measurement model.

The tables show that all of the adapted items have achieved higher loadings (indicator reliability) of above 0.50, standardized AVE of above 0.50, CR above 0.70 and Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of above 0.70 (i.e. internal consistency reliability). Similarly, discriminant validity is higher to another factor when diagonally compared (Hair *et al.*, 2006, 2014; Nunnally, 1978; Venkatesh, 2000). Thus, we can conclude that this measurement model is suitable for structural modeling to test the study hypotheses.

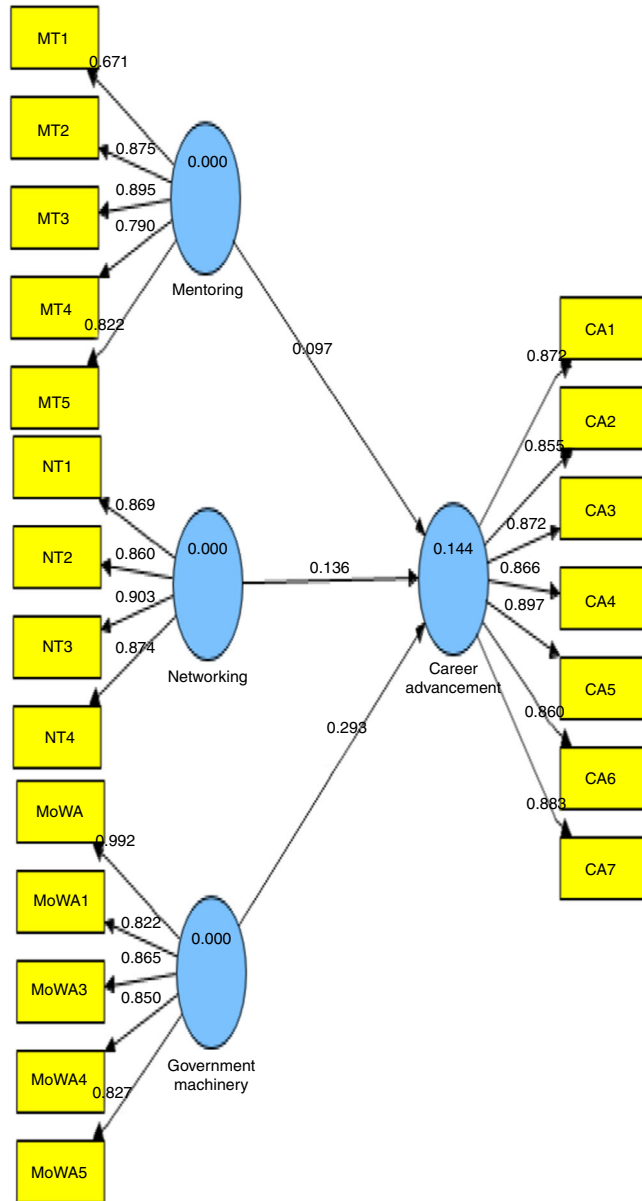
### *Structural model*

The structural modeling is performed to ascertain the path coefficient for the testing of hypothesis (Figure 2). In a view to analyzing the relationships between the independent variables and a dependent variable, mean, SD, correlations,  $\beta$ ,  $t$ -test and  $p$ -value were examined in testing the hypotheses. Accordingly, Fisher and Yetes (1963) argued that the  $t$ -test values for one-tailed are significant at 2.326 (1 percent), 1.645 (5 percent) and 1.282 (10 percent) with the samples of above 120. Hence, this study adopted Fisher and Heyes  $t$ -test values threshold in testing the formulated hypotheses. Table V shows the study results of the tested hypotheses.

Table IV presented results of the means, SD and correlation coefficients. The correlation analysis shows that mentoring, networking and government machinery support were significantly and positively related to career advancement (mentoring  $r = 0.120$ , networking  $r = 0.246$ , government machinery support  $r = 0.363$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

However, a correlation coefficient shows only the direction and the strength of the association or relationship between two constructs, but do not explain the influence of those independent constructs on the dependent construct (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, regression analysis was conducted to determine the predicting impact of the constructs in Table V.

From Table V, we can conclude that all of the three stated hypotheses were supported by the data collected.  $H1$  was supported at  $\beta = 0.2933$ ;  $t = 4.8211$ ;  $p = 0.01$ ,  $H2$  was supported at  $\beta = 0.0968$ ;  $t = 2.2736$ ;  $p = 0.05$  and last,  $H3$  was supported at  $\beta = 0.1364$ ;  $t = 2.1356$ ;  $p = 0.05$  based on the threshold-adopted  $t$ -values (Fisher and Yetes, 1963). Therefore, mentoring, networking and government machinery support were positively and significantly related to the career advancement of female academic staff. Hence, the three hypotheses were supported in this study.



**Figure 1.**  
Measurement model

Variables	Condition index	Collinearity statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
Mentoring	8.730	0.985	1.015
Networking	10.785	0.906	1.103
Government machinery	15.285	0.913	1.095

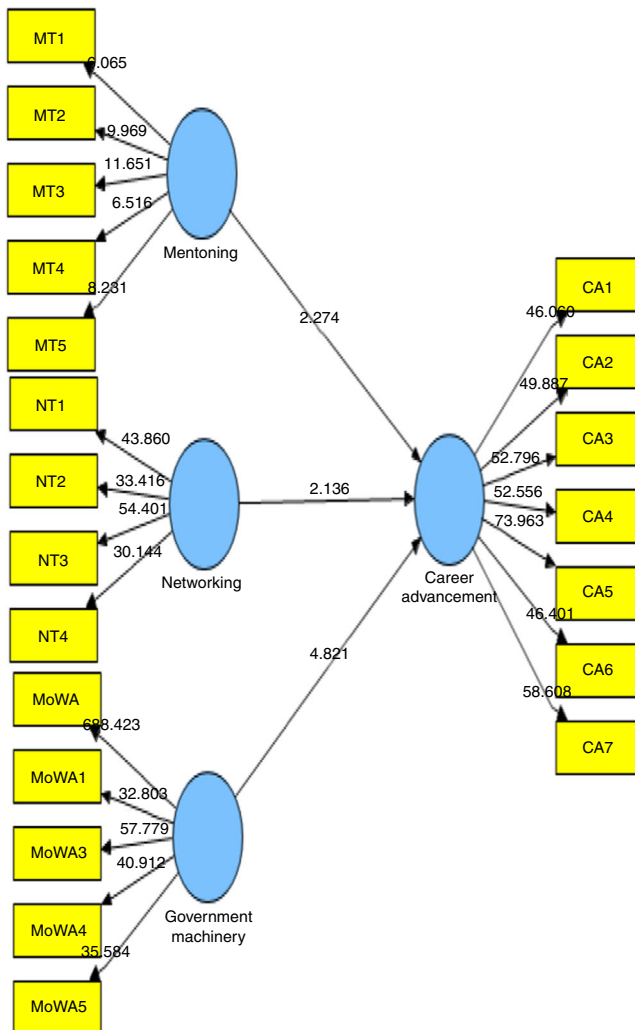
**Table II.**  
Multicollinearity test

**Discussion**

This study aims to examine the relationships between mentoring, networking and government support on career advancement of female academic staff in the Nigerian universities. In this vein, the results of this study revealed that all of the variables were found to be related and significant to career advancement.

Variables	Career advancement	Government machinery	Mentoring	Networking
Career advancement	0.872			
Government machinery	0.339	0.873		
Mentoring	0.1363	0.0814	0.814	
Networking	0.2289	0.2778	0.1144	0.876

**Table III.**  
Discriminant validity



**Figure 2.**  
Structural model

Past studies on career advancement showed that mentoring is an important variable in explaining female career advancement. This result is consistent with the other findings within the discourse community (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015; Patwardhan *et al.*, 2015; Petersen *et al.*, 2012; Arokiasamy *et al.*, 2011; Okurame, 2008; Searby *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, Blood *et al.* (2012) stressed that mentoring and its availability and accessibility lead to career advancement because mentoring promotes staff skills and knowledge. Arguably, *H1* is supported. Moreover, Viator argued that informal mentoring increases role conflict, create confusion of what is expected from staff due to different expectations from different superior officers. Due to this challenge of role disputes, Kram and Isabella (1985) opined that peer relationship rather than mentoring addresses the confusion of order from superiors. Wayne *et al.* (1999) stressed that career mentoring was only linked to promotability, but not related to salary progression and career satisfaction. Nonetheless, Fagenson-Eland *et al.* (1997) found no differences between formal and informal mentoring. Lim *et al.* (2015) lamented that African-American women and men did not perceive differently on the benefit of mentoring on career development. Therefore, mentoring is potential to career development of both male and female employees. Craig *et al.* (2013) emphasized that those workers who have mentoring exhibit higher level of organizational commitment and in turn reduce labor turnover and further career advancement.

It is also found that networking promotes opportunities for workers to achieve a higher level career in an organization (McCarthy, 2004 in Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010). In this regard, this study found that structural analysis on networking shows a positive and significant relation with career advancement of female academic staff. Consistent with this finding, networking was positive and significantly related to career advancement (Arokiasamy *et al.*, 2011; Pini *et al.*, 2004; Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Thus, *H3* is supported. In this sense, networking is a factor for aiding career progression among academic staff.

In this regard, networking is an influential factor to women's career opportunities and advancement. However, accessibility to networks devoid of old boys' syndrome hinders women's career advancement. Hence, there are needs for networks exclusive of females (Pini *et al.*, 2004). While Bozionelos and Wang (2006) opined that networking was limitedly related to career success among Chinese white collar employees and this could be attributed to the differences in cultural characteristics of Chinese society with that of the Anglo-Saxons, this study's results are in concordance with the Anglo-Saxon context.

Last, government machinery through the activities of Ministry of Women Affairs Department and its pet agencies influences the level of female career advancement

**Table IV.**  
Mean, SD and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Career advancement	3.9717	0.88374	–			
Mentoring	3.6668	0.89539	0.120*	–		
Networking	3.9307	0.90297	0.246**	0.114*	–	
MoWA	3.8587	0.83011	0.363**	0.075	0.292*	–

**Notes:** \*,\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 and 0.01, respectively

**Table V.**  
Hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Relationship	Std $\beta$	SD	<i>t</i> -value	Decisions
<i>H1</i>	Mentoring → Career advancement	0.0968	0.0426	2.2736*	Supported
<i>H2</i>	Networking → Career advancement	0.1364	0.0639	2.1356*	Supported
<i>H3</i>	Government machinery support → Career advancement	0.2933	0.0608	4.8211**	Supported

**Notes:** \* $p = 0.05$ ; \*\* $p = 0.01$

(Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2013). The FMWASD and its pet agencies were developed with policy trust of advocacy, sensitization and public enlightenment in Nigeria. Moreover, the ministry aims to uphold the International Convention on Treaties and Protocols and the realization of the 35 percent quota or Affirmative Action and the increase in the rate of Nigerian women's participation in politics and governance (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2013; Ovute *et al.*, 2015).

In a supportive manner, Sharma and Dhal (2016) argued that government policy to female staff created accessibility to science education and overall career development of women workers. Moreover, Mathur-Helm (2005) opined that government policy on equity of employment through reservation of positions for women in South African has served as a mechanism for equitable representation of females in senior positions. However, despite the legislation, the policy remains a mirage. Nevertheless, Lane *et al.* (2016) stressed that systematic support for a variety of policies and practices of government machinery leads to career advancement (Cho and Kwon, 2010).

Therefore, this study tested the perception of academic staff in respect to the role that government machinery support through the Ministry of Women Affairs plays in career advancement. The statistical outcome revealed a positive and significant level of significance. This further meant that activities of Ministry of Women Affairs toward women and their career are yielding positive results. Thus, the government should put more attention to the sector to encourage women's career advancement. Hence, it can be deduced that government machinery is positively related to career advancement because the data have supported the hypothesis. This result is not surprising because environment facet of the social cognitive career theory postulates that external factors influence career advancement (Lent *et al.*, 2002; Lin and Huang, 2005).

### Theoretical implications

This study has empirically answered the most enduring question of why some people are promoted faster than others (Lin and Huang, 2005). The reason deduced from this study and in line with the social capital theory is that those people who gain social capital than others occupy more advantageous network, support and position. Therefore, social capital allows access to a variety of support system with necessary information and skills to contribute to organizational development. Thereby, social capital, in turn, influences staff performance and career advancement such as promotion, an increase in salary and learning of new skills (Lin and Huang, 2005; Seibert *et al.*, 2001). The social capital theory postulates that the most paramount factor to development is "central network" at which an individual is attached to an organization. That is, individuals' position in a central network of social relations influences social capital, which in turn creates values and access to social resources that provide positive career outcome (Lin and Huang, 2005).

Therefore, this study has provided empirical evidence that supported a social capital theory based on the positive relationships that existed between mentoring, networking and government support career advancement. In line with social capital theory, these study findings showed that the three independent variables predicted career advancement. Hence, organizational and government supports led to career advancement.

Another part of this of study is that government machinery support was found to be the most determining factor of career advancement among other variables in the model. This result is interesting because of the insight that this study explores the relevance of the external environment (government machinery) in promoting career advancement of female academic staff. Thus, this is a new direction in understanding the role of national government in influencing career advancement at its various agencies, institutions and ministries.

**Practical implications**

This study is a valuable guide for practitioners, policy makers and researchers in understanding the role of mentoring, networking and government support on career advancement of female academic staff. Thus, this study is a viable document directing toward effective management of female academic staff in particular and overall HRM in Nigeria and other countries with similar cultural and political characteristics. Hence, the study offers a policy agenda in the planning, formulation and implementation of strategies for a diverse, stable and productive university system.

Therefore, management of Nigerian universities and other education stakeholders should work out strategies and utilize the socio-political attributes of social capital on female career advancement. Since social capital influences career advancement, female academicians should be encouraged to utilize both internal (mentoring and networking) and external (government machinery) supports in their quest for promotion, salary, status, learning and a prospect (Arokiasamy *et al.*, 2011).

Finally, based on the positive empirical outcomes of social capital factors of career advancement, the Academic Staff Union of Universities and women's right groups would find this study valuable in using socio-political variables toward helping more female academicians reach the top level of their careers.

**Limitation and future study**

This study is limited to social capital factors of mentoring, networking and government support. Further study may be extended through an eco-system approach. The eco-system approach is recommended because career advancement is influenced by a system framework (Brown and Ryan Krane, 2000; Patton and McMahon, 2014). Therefore, future studies can examine career advancement from socio-structural and cultural factors (eco-system) that strengthen or in some situation weaken human agency in career development (Brown and Ryan Krane, 2000). Moreover, this study restricted to the perceptions of public universities academicians though large sample size was utilized. However, further studies need to broaden scope that integrates opinions of female academic staff from both public and private universities.

As common with the quantitative method, the approach only reveals what happened but to know why it happens, the qualitative study is needed. Hence, there is a need for mixed methods in the future research. Another aspect that requires attention is the assessing the diverse opinions of both male and female academicians on the same variables. Unifying the collective opinions of both genders may give a clue about what they perceive as the most significant predictors of career advancement since they work in the same environment.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings of this study showed that all of the three social capital factors had predicted career advancement of female academic staff in Nigerian universities. The results revealed that mentoring, networking and government machinery were positively and significantly related to the career advancement of female academic staff. The results mean that the three hypotheses were supported. Hence, practitioners especially university authorities and national government can adopt these findings as a guide to policymaking and implementation about career advancement of female academicians. Thus, it can be further deduced that adopting these independent variables would predict career advancement. In turn, career progression of female academic staff to the top would create balance and lead to diverse university institutions. It is to be noted that a diverse organization with both males and females proportionately distributed at senior level shall promote competition and consequently improve performance and productivity of universities and nation at large.

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### Further reading

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**Appendix**Female  
academic staff  
in Nigerian  
universities

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**541**

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Components	1	2	3	4
CA5	0.891			
CA7	0.876			
CA3	0.864			
CA4	0.853			
CA6	0.851			
CA1	0.836			
CA2	0.828			
GM4		0.847		
GM3		0.823		
GM2		0.804		
GM1		0.791		
GM5		0.779		
MT2			0.88	
MT3			0.879	
MT4			0.857	
MT5			0.856	
MT1			0.579	
NT3				0.883
NT4				0.859
NT2				0.853
NT1				0.846

**Notes:** Extraction method: principal component analysis; Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

**Table AI.**  
Rotated component  
matrix of exploratory  
factors

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