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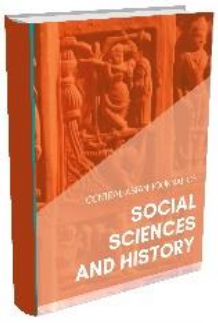

Women Academic and Tertiary Education in Nigeria

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Abstract:
This paper scrutinizes the status of women academics in Nigerian tertiary education, highlighting their pivotal roles, challenges, and the factors leading to their underrepresentation. Despite playing essential roles in teaching, research, and community service, women academics face persistent challenges in achieving equal representation in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The study identifies foundational enrolment issues, inadequate implementation of gender policies, cultural and religious beliefs, early marriage practices, career demands, economic constraints, patriarchal practices, and insufficient funding for female education as contributing factors to this imbalance. The research emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges, fostering gender equality. Recognizing the indispensable contributions of women academics to the development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the paper recommends providing more opportunities for women academics in terms of responsibilities and leadership roles to rectify the existing underrepresentation.

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Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of educational systems, tertiary education emerges as a deliberate and structured endeavor, designed not only for individual growth but also for the profound transformation of societies. Ogunode, Edinoh, and Okolie (2023f) define tertiary education as a systematic

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educational framework committed to the comprehensive development of individuals and the holistic metamorphosis of communities. Aligned with the Federal Republic of Nigeria's national policy on education (2013), tertiary education spans institutions such as universities, inter-university centers, innovation enterprise institutions, colleges of education, monotechnics, polytechnics, and specialized entities like colleges of agriculture and schools of health and technology.

Considered the ultimate phase of formal education, tertiary education plays a pivotal role in cultivating a skilled workforce crucial for a nation's social, economic, and technological advancement. Akin-Ibidiran, Ogunode, and Ibidiran John (2022) underscore its organized nature, emphasizing intensive teaching, research, and community service. Encompassing a diverse array of higher learning institutions, including universities, tertiary education serves as the crucible for intellectual exploration and societal progress. This study delves into the dynamics of women academics within this transformative landscape, addressing the challenges impeding their optimal representation and advocating for strategies to ensure their equitable participation in shaping the future through tertiary education.

Tertiary education stands as a global beacon for fostering inclusivity, equity, diversity, and equality, transcending barriers to offer learning opportunities to all, regardless of background or identity. However, it is evident that many tertiary institutions in Nigeria, and notably in numerous developing nations, lag behind in championing gender equity and equality within their organizational structures. A glaring example is found in Nigerian universities, where the composition of academic and non-academic staff reflects a stark gender imbalance. According to the Nigerian University System Statistical Digest (2019), out of a total of 73,443 academic staff in 2019, only 17,380 were female, emphasizing a significant underrepresentation of women in academic roles.

The gender gap extends to non-academic positions, where the report indicates that out of 152,475 non-academic staff, 56,478 were female, further underscoring the systemic challenges faced by women in various capacities within tertiary institutions. In delving into leadership positions, a study conducted by Dada, Ogunode, and Ajayi (2022) focused on gender equity in the appointment of principal officers in university administration within the North-Central region of Nigeria. Combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study utilized data from the National Universities Commission (2019) and uncovered a notable dearth of female representation in key leadership roles. This study sheds light on the persistently low and discouraging presence of women in every facet of tertiary institutions, emphasizing the imperative for comprehensive strategies to address gender disparities and foster a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

Several studies illuminate the intricate landscape of gender imbalances within academic staff compositions across Nigerian tertiary institutions. Ekwukoma's (2018) investigation of selected faculties at the University of Benin highlighted a notable gender disparity, favoring females in the Faculty of Education but revealing a significant gap in the Faculties of Engineering and Environmental Sciences, where male dominance prevailed. Similarly, an exploration of the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, by Adegun (2012) and Adebayo & Akanle (2014) underscored a pervasive gender skew, with 87.2% of lecturers being male and only 12.8% female. This trend persists across all academic cadres within the polytechnic.

Delving into Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Adegun's (2012) research exposed a nuanced gender distribution across various faculties. While the College of Medicine had a modest 8.1% female

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representation, the Faculty of Engineering displayed a stark 6.7% female presence, indicating a pronounced male predominance. The Faculty of Management Science and Social Science showcased meager percentages of 8.7% and 7.3% females, respectively, reflecting a challenging scenario for female employment. Notably, the Faculty of Education demonstrated a relatively higher female representation at 34.7%, while the Faculty of Agriculture and other disciplines exhibited varying degrees of gender imbalances.

Egunjobi, (2009) in a study of Commonwealth nations indicated that percentage of women employed as fulltime academic staff ranges from the highest of 50% in Jamaica to the least of 9.5% in Ghana, with a Commonwealth average of 24%. The smallest percentages were found in Ghana 9.5%, Nigeria 13.6%, Tanzania 11.0%, Zambia 10.9% and Zimbabwe 9.8% all in Africa, for example, University of Ilorin, also showed female/male ratio of 11.6% to 88.4%.

Arubayi's (2009) extensive study unveils a concerning scenario within Federal and State Colleges of Education, revealing a pronounced gender imbalance among lecturers. The distribution of lecturers by sex emphasizes a bottom-heavy structure, with 50% holding first degrees, and 38% possessing professional first degrees, of which only 24% are females. The study further discloses that 29% of lecturers have postgraduate professional degrees, with female representation at 22%.

Non-professional qualifications present another dimension, with 12% of lecturers holding non-professional first degrees and 15% having non-professional postgraduate degrees. Ph.D. holders account for 6%, and among them, only 21% are females. Shockingly, the overall female lecturer representation stands at a mere 12%, with male lecturers outnumbering their female counterparts sevenfold. In terms of quantity, the study identifies a total of 8,329 lecturers across 56 Federal and State Colleges of Education, with a discouraging 22.18% reported as female lecturers. The computed lecturer-student ratio indicates a ratio of 1:28 in Federal Colleges of Education and 1:27 in State Colleges, underlining the gender disparity pervasive in the academic sector.

Collectively, these studies emphasize the persisting gender gaps within academic staff demographics in Nigerian tertiary institutions, urging a critical examination of systemic factors perpetuating these imbalances and the implementation of targeted measures to foster inclusivity and equality. Despite governmental and non-governmental efforts to enhance women's participation, the gender imbalance persists. The National Gender Policy (NGP) in Nigeria recommends a 35% affirmative action, aiming for more inclusive representation in elective political and appointive public service positions. This study emphasizes the imperative to scrutinize the multifaceted factors contributing to gender imbalances within the Nigerian university system, urging targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Women Academic

Women Academic are professional female folks working in tertiary institutions. Women Academic are professional female employed to work in tertiary and their functions include teaching, researching and provision of community services. Women academic are found in every programme of the tertiary institutions. Women Academic are found in the sciences, arts and social science. Women Academic are also been found in leadership position of tertiary institutions. Women Academic have been appointed as vice chancellors, deputy vice chancellors and DEAN’s and head of departments. The contribution of women academic to the development and transformation of tertiary institutions cannot be underestimated.

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Factors Responsible for Low Representation of Women Academic in Nigeria Tertiary Education

There are many factors responsible factors contributing to low under representation of women academic in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Some of the factors include; foundational enrolment problems, poor implementation of ender policies, culture and religious belief, marriage and career demand, economic factor and patriarchal practice and poor investment in women's education

Foundational Enrolment Problems

Foundational enrolment problem of girls from the basic schools to junior secondary schools and senior secondary schools to tertiary institutions is a major factor that has contributed to poor representation of women in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The enrolment and completion rate of girl's child keeping drop in on every form of education till the universities level. British Council, 2014); James (2014) and Edinoh, Odili & Nwafor (2023) noted that many girls fail to make the transition to junior secondary school for a range of educational, economic and socio-cultural reasons. An over-age starts to school, the onset of puberty or increased costs of secondary education may all put an early end to girls' education. Girls' low levels of transition and retention in junior secondary schools are becoming an increasing concern because it implies that girls will continue to fail to acquire fundamental life skills, including literacy and numeracy. In a study conducted by Bello & Oluwadare (2013) and Omoregie & Abraham (2009) on the statistics of male and female genders enrolled for studies at every level of education, it was discovered that there is persistent gender inequality in the education sector of Nigeria favoring male.

Poor Implementation of Gender Policies

Poor implementation of various gender policies at every level of education has also appears to have contributed to underrepresentation of women in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Ogunode & Salman (2023) submitted that poor implementation of various gender policies on the education of females in Nigeria has accounted for poor representation in every aspect of the universities in Nigeria. The poor implementation of gender policy on admission is responsible for the gender imbalance in terms of admission in the university system in Nigeria. The poor implementation of gender policy on recruitment is responsible for more males among the staff of the universities in Nigerian than the females and the poor implementation of gender policy on the appointment of universities manager and administrators gave males the upper hands in the occupation of leadership positions of the universities than the female folks. Ogunode and Ahmed (2021) and Ogunode Ahmed, and Yahaya (2021); Ikwuegbu, (2022) and British Council (2012) observed one of the important reasons why women have not received adequate benefits from years of planning and development is their inadequate representation can be linked to non-implementation of the gender acts and policies in Nigeria. Most gender policies designed and formulated to ensure gender equality in recruitment are poorly implemented in higher institutions.

Cultural Factors and Religious Beliefs: Unraveling Barriers to Women's Education in Nigeria

Culture, a multifaceted concept encompassing social behaviors, norms, beliefs, and customs, significantly shapes the educational landscape in Nigeria. This intricate tapestry of cultural practices has contributed to the conspicuous underrepresentation of women in tertiary institutions across the country. Deep-rooted cultural-specific reasons act as formidable barriers, impeding girls' education.

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Religious beliefs, particularly those rooted in misinterpretations of the Islamic holy text, the Quran, play a pivotal role in obstructing girls' educational journeys. Parents, influenced by these misinterpretations, may opt to keep their daughters out of school, fearing potential moral repercussions. Additionally, pervasive prejudices against education, coupled with an ingrained sense of gender disparity, further perpetuate the gender gap in educational attainment.

Gargiulo (2017) underscores a prevailing perception that investing in girls' education is often viewed as futile, as societal expectations limit their roles and potential contributions. Even if a girl defies societal norms and assumes a provider role, the persisting gender wage gap ensures she earns less than her male counterparts. The work of Omoregie & Abraham (2009) delves into the historical, cultural, and patriarchal structure of traditional Nigerian society, revealing foundational roots of gender inequality. Echoing these sentiments, studies by Egun & Tibi (2010), Famolari (2014), Hassan (2011), and others consistently identify cultural factors as hindrances to the development of girl child education, elucidating the substantial gender gap prevalent in educational institutions.

Addressing these deeply ingrained cultural barriers is imperative for dismantling obstacles to women's education in Nigeria. Culturally sensitive interventions, coupled with educational campaigns, can foster a more inclusive environment and pave the way for increased female representation in tertiary institutions.

Early Marriage

Early marriage practices, particularly prevalent in the Northern part of Nigeria, stand as a significant barrier to the adequate representation of women in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Ogunode & Salman (2023) assert that these practices contribute to the underrepresentation of female individuals within the university system. The vulnerability of women and girls to poverty, coupled with cultural and societal vices, is exacerbated by empirical evidence showcasing gender disparities in enrollment, retention, and completion across all educational levels—primary, secondary, and tertiary. Gargiulo (2017) highlights a distressing aspect of early marriage—the perception of it as a desirable alternative for many low-income families. Beyond social considerations, early marriage is seen as a means of expanding social networks and gaining financial benefits through the customary "bride price" paid by the groom's family to the wife's family. This economic aspect inadvertently perpetuates the cycle of gender imbalance in education.

Alarming statistics from Nigeria indicate that 43% of girls are married before their 18th birthday, with a substantial regional disparity favoring boys, particularly in the Northern states. In the South-East, where boys engage in income-generating activities, the disparity shifts in favor of girls. Disturbingly, the survey conducted in 2008 revealed that 28% of young women aged 15-19 were already married, compared to a mere 1% of young men. Early marriage is further compounded by polygamous unions, affecting 26% of these young women. Moreover, Action Aid (2011) highlights that 43% of girls in six Northern States cited early marriage as a major obstacle preventing them from continuing their education, with an additional 32% citing pregnancy. In Gombe and Adamawa States, 60% of girls' withdrawals from primary school were linked to early marriages, driven by parental considerations grounded in religious obligations. To address this pervasive issue, concerted efforts are needed, encompassing awareness campaigns, policy changes, and community engagement to shift cultural norms and protect the educational rights of girls, ultimately fostering increased representation in tertiary institutions.

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Career Demand

Career progression within tertiary institutions presents a substantial challenge for women, contributing to their underrepresentation in academic roles. In tertiary education, the trajectory toward career advancement typically demands individuals to attain multiple degrees to reach the pinnacle of their academic careers. This rigorous academic journey, although essential for professional growth, places women at a disadvantage, particularly in the context of marital demands. The demand for advanced degrees poses a significant hurdle for women who may be navigating the complexities of balancing academic pursuits with family life. This challenge is exemplified by the fact that many women opt out of academia due to the demanding nature of career growth, promotion requirements, and the pursuit of the highest echelons of the academic ladder.

Research by Álvarez, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, (2023) in sustainability underscores the importance of acknowledging and addressing these challenges, especially in fields such as Renewable and Sustainable Energy Education. The case study on the development of the Electric Vehicle EOLO highlights the need for inclusive policies that consider the unique challenges faced by women in academia. Additionally, Olatunde-Aiyedun, & Adams, (2022) contribute to this discourse in their study on the Effect of blended learning models on students' academic achievement and retention in Science Education. While focusing on student outcomes, this research indirectly emphasizes the importance of creating an academic environment that supports the diverse needs of educators, particularly women striving for career advancement.

To address these challenges, there is a pressing need for institutional policies that recognize and accommodate the realities of women's lives, providing support structures, mentorship programs, and flexible career pathways. By acknowledging the unique challenges faced by women in academia, institutions can foster a more inclusive environment that promotes gender equality and encourages the full participation of women in academic careers.

Economic Factor

Poor economic status of many parents in Nigeria may have appear to a have contributed to the poor representation of women in the workforce of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Action Aid (2012); Action Aid (2013); and Akunga, (2010) concluded that the high rate of poverty in Nigeria has forced many girls and women out of school. Many parents are unable to provide their children especially the girl child the necessary support to be in school. Many research studies have established the detrimental effects of tuition charges on girls' attendance and progression. Net Attendance Rates for girls increase drastically as household wealth increases indicating a strong correlation between school attendance and income. Recent research corroborates this association with 46% of girls who had withdrawn from school indicating that they dropped out for economic reasons (UNICEF, 2014). Also, Ogunode & Salman (2023d) and Amadi, (2019) opined that the economic status of many Nigerian parents has accounted for the gender imbalance in some Nigerian universities. With over 60% of Nigerians (almost 100 million people) living in poverty, on less than US$1 per day, girls are often sent to work in markets or hawk wares on the street. UNICEF in Ogunode (2020) found that many children do not attend schools in Nigeria because their labour is needed to either help at home or to bring additional income into the family. Many parents cannot afford the costs of sending their children to school such

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as uniforms and textbooks. For others, the distance to the nearest school is also a major hindrance, cultural bias; most parents do not send their children, especially girls to school and prefer to send them to Qur'an school rather than formal schools. Even when children get enrolled in school, they do not finish the primary cycle. The reason for this low completion rate includes child labour, economic hardship and early marriage for girls.

Moreover, Olamoyegun, Olatunde-Aiyedun, and Ogunode (2022) conducted a study focused on the funding dynamics of science programs in public secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. While their research is specific to secondary education, it sheds light on broader issues concerning educational funding in the country. The findings could be extrapolated to emphasize the interconnectedness of economic challenges, insufficient funding, and their subsequent impact on the educational journey of girls. As their study underscores, addressing the funding disparities and economic barriers at the secondary level is integral to creating a pipeline that encourages more female participation in tertiary education, thereby contributing to the broader goal of achieving gender balance in academic institutions.

Patriarchal Practice

Patriarchal practice in the university community in Nigeria has contributed to the low representation of women in universities. This patriarchal practice has also influenced admission enrolment and other related activities in the university system (Ogunode, et al 2022). National Gender Policy Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006); Arubayi (2009); Adegun, (2012); Adebayo & Akanle (2014) posited that in Africa including Nigeria, the culture of patriarchy, while not exclusive to these areas has been allowed to infringe very seriously on the human rights of women, socialization of children and development practice through policy. Such norms have increased incidences of violence against women, early marriage, negative traditional practices such as widowhood practices, female genital mutilations, and negative sexual behavior of men against their spouses and so on. Aina (1998) pointed out that culture is a strong explanatory variable in understanding the predominant gender ideology within Nigerian society. Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women's lives.

Poor Funding for Female Education

Poor investment in women's education in Nigeria has also contributed to gender imbalance in Nigerian educational institutions, especially the universities. Poor funding is one of the major problems facing the girl child education in Nigeria. The budgetary allocation for the implementation of programmes and policies that ought to have promoted women's education in Nigeria is very low (Ogunode et al 2023d). Musa (2019) observed poor investment in female education in Nigeria is among the factors responsible for the development of women's programmes in Nigeria. Dada, et al (2022) concluded that the government's inability to fund female education in Nigeria has led to poor representation of women in the leadership positions in universities in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this paper has meticulously examined the multifaceted factors contributing to the low representation of women academics in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Foundational enrolment issues, poor gender policy implementation, cultural and religious beliefs, early marriage, career demands, economic constraints, patriarchal practices, and inadequate investment in women's education were identified as pivotal contributors to this disparity.

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In light of these findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Enhance Opportunities for Women Academics: Provide more opportunities for women academics in terms of responsibilities and leadership roles to serve as a catalyst for inspiring increased female participation in academia.
2. Government Enforcement of Gender Policies: Ensure rigorous implementation of gender policies across all administrative and managerial aspects of tertiary institutions.
3. Address Economic Barriers: Remove or reduce the financial burden of education for families in poverty, thereby fostering increased enrolment, retention, and completion of education for girls at all levels.
4. Increase Investment in Women's Education: Allocate more resources and funding to women's education at every level, acknowledging its pivotal role in societal development.
5. Establish Additional Tertiary Institutions: Expand access to education for females by establishing more tertiary institutions, simultaneously institutionalizing incentives to boost girls' enrolment.
6. Challenge Discriminatory Norms and Practices: Initiate public enlightenment programs to challenge discriminatory gender norms, patriarchal practices, beliefs, early marriage customs, and stereotypes hindering girls' education and educational attainment in Nigeria.

These recommendations, if diligently implemented, hold the potential to dismantle barriers, fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape in Nigeria.

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