

Gender Imbalance in Nigerian University System Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper titled "Gender Imbalance in Nigerian University System" was carried out to analyze the factors responsible for the gender imbalance in universities in Nigeria. Secondary data were collected from print and online publications. A content analytical approach was employed in the research methodology. The study concluded that poor implementation of gender policies, cultural factors, socio-economic status of parents, traditional beliefs, early marriage, poor funding of female education, poor access to educational opportunities, weak institutions and patriarchal practice are the factors responsible for the gender imbalance in the Nigerian university system. Based on the factors identified, the paper among other recommendations for full implementation of all gender policies in the universities across Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender, Imbalance, Universities, Challenges, Education.

Introduction

Public universities are universities owned by the government. Public universities are universities established to provide post-secondary schools for Nigerians. Public universities are universities established by an act of parliament to serve the interest of the general public. Public universities deal with the provision of teaching, research and community services (Ogunode, 2020). The objectives of the universities in Nigerian Higher education, including professional education have the following aims: the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies; the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment; the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2014). Public universities in Nigeria are grouped into federal and state-owned universities. The federal universities are owned by the federal government of Nigeria while the state universities are owned by the state government (Ogunode, 2020). The Nigerian university system is plagued with many challenges. Gender imbalance has been identified as one of the problems in the system. (Chima, 2013) observed that in Nigeria the educational imbalance between the male and female is very wide.

In the area of student enrolment, a total of 2,159,461 students are enrolled directly by the NUS at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels through full-time and part-time modes, out of which 931,523 (43.1%) are females. The undergraduate new entrant enrolments are also presented by University, Mode, Programme, Discipline, and by Ownership. There were 785,259 new entrants

undergraduate students in Nigerian Universities in 2019, comprising 438,260 males (55.8%) and 346,999 (44.2%) females. Also, a total of 78,761 students are enrolled in Affiliate Institutions at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, out of which 39,015 (49.5%) are females (Nigerian University System Statistical Digest 2019).

In terms of output, the total output across all types and modes is also presented. In 2019 there were 267,229 graduates across all programmes and all modes, comprising 150,731 males and 116,498 females (Nigerian University System Statistical Digest, 2019).

In terms of staffing, the academic staffing of Universities is presented using the NUC norm of Professors, Readers (Associate Professors), Senior Lecturers, Lecturers I and below by University, by Gender, and by Ownership. A total of 73,443 academic staff were reported for 2019, comprising 56,063 males and 17,380 females. The non-academic staffing of Universities is presented using the NUC norms of Senior Technical Staff, Senior Administrative Staff (Non-Secretarial), Senior Administrative Staff (Secretarial), Junior Technical Staff, and Junior Non-Technical Staff by University, by Gender, and by Ownership in academic units and non-academic units, as well as overall total of non-academic staff. A total of 152,475 non-academic staff were reported for 2019, comprising 95,997 males and 56,478 females (Nigerian University System Statistical Digest, 2019).

Also, Ekwukoma (2018) did a study that examined gender imbalance in the staff strength of selected faculties of the University of Benin. The population of the study comprised all the lecturers in the Faculties of Education, Engineering and Environmental Sciences as of the 2016/2017 academic session and the total number was 403. All the lecturers in these selected faculties also constituted the sample for the study. A simple percentage was used to analyze the data. The findings of this study revealed a very insignificant gender disparity (in favour of the female gender) in the number of lecturers in the Faculty of Education and a very wide gender gap (in favour of the male gender) in the staff strength of the Faculties of Engineering and Environmental Sciences of the University of Benin as at 2016/2017 academic session.

In the area of leadership positions in some public universities, Dada, Ogunode & Ajayi (2022) did a study that finds out gender equity in the appointment of principal officers in university administration: implications for implementation of gender policy in North-Central, Nigeria. The study adopted both secondary and primary methods of data collection; hence it is both qualitative and quantitative. The secondary data were drawn from the National universities commission (2019) statistic data. The result resulted collected revealed that there are low females in the leadership (principal officers) positions of public universities in North-Central Nigeria. It is very important to analyze the various factors responsible for the gender imbalance in the Nigerian university system.

Reasons for Gender Imbalance in the Nigerian University System

Gender imbalances in the school system can be defined as the proportion of males to females in a given population (students' population, academic staff population, non-academic staff population and principal officers' population). This is usually expressed as the number of males per 100 females in a given population. Gender equality (balanced gender) on the other hand is when people of all genders (males and females) have equal access, rights, responsibilities, and opportunities to available resources.

There are many factors responsible for the gender imbalance in the universities in Nigeria. Some of these factors include; poor implementation of gender policies, cultural factors, socio-economic status of parents, traditional beliefs, early marriage, poor funding of female education, poor access to educational opportunities, weak institutions and patriarchal practice.

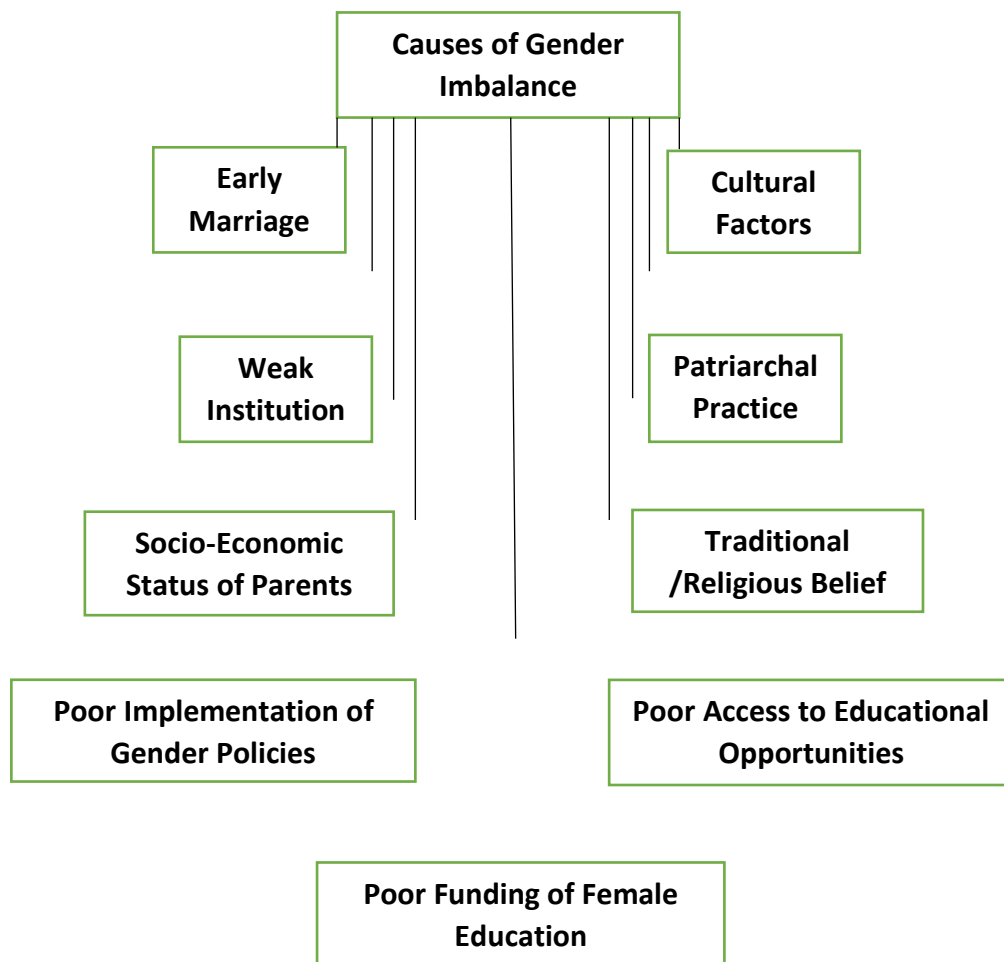


Figure 1: Conceptual Causes of Gender Imbalance in the Nigerian University System

Source: Ogunode & Salman (2023)

Poor Implementation of Gender Policies

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 & Ahmed (2021) and Ogunode Ahmed, & Yahaya (2021) 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. Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2006); James (2014) & Deji (2016) acknowledged that the inability of the various government institutions to implement gender policies in public and private institutions is responsible for gender inequality in most of the public institutions in Nigeria. Ogunode, Lawan & Yusuf (2021) concluded that the poor implementation of the Child Rights Act which was passed at the Federal level in 2003 has accounted for gender inequality in the schools.

Socio-Economic Status of Parent

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 (2005) 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 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. Also, Lawal & Muhammed (2014) discovered that the socio-economic status of parents, parental occupation and early marriage, and academic factors are the courses of the gender gap in science and technology education. ActionAid (2012); ActionAid (2013) & 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).

Cultural factors

The cultural factor in Nigeria has also contributed to gender imbalance in the Nigerian university system. Ikwuegbu, (2022) noted that culturally, Nigeria is gender stratified. The importance of gender of a person is a real issue in Nigeria and very much determines one's place in the educational, economic, social, political, religious and religious strata. There is glaring inequality in almost every aspect of the Nigerian society. It is an existing reality that cannot be easily ignored, both in the family, social, religious and economic institutions as well as in governance. There is a severe imbalance in the educational, workforce and leadership opportunities in the country. Enough women are not empowered educationally and given opportunities in the labour market and worse still, in the area of leadership. Statistics conducted in 1990 revealed that a very minimal percentage of women were professors, about 1.8% of all the professors in Nigeria, furthermore, only 11% of women participated in the Nigerian economy as against 30% of men (Olonade, et al: 2021). A study conducted by Omoregie & Abraham (2009) revealed that the reason for the inequality is fundamentally due to the historical, cultural, and patriarchal structure of the traditional Nigerian society (Omoregie & Abraham (2009); Egun & Tibi, (2010); Hassan (2011); ActionAid (2011) and Famolari, (2014); also identified cultural factor as hampering the development of girl child education in Nigeria and that it is responsible for the wide gap between male and female in the educational institutions.

Traditional beliefs

The traditional beliefs in Nigeria have a relationship with the gender imbalance in the universities. Hassan (2011) surveyed the gender inequality in industrial and technical education in Nigeria; parents' perspective in the 21st century, the study revealed that traditional beliefs and parental educational background are the causes of gender gap in science and technology courses in Nigeria. Ikwuegbu, (2022) observed that in a typical Nigerian traditional society irrespective of tribe or ethnicity, gender places one on the strata of life. One is valued according to his or her gender. Male genders are generally more appreciated than females and are accorded more rights and privileges regarding house chores, opportunities in the family, inheritance, more social recognitions, privileged social and religious recognitions and roles etc. This translates so strongly into the regular life of Nigerian society. This unjust practice is presumably accepted as

the modus operandi in society without being questioned or challenged. Any attempt to challenge it raises an eyebrow and may earn the person an image of a rebel. Bixby Center (no date) and British Council (2012) argued that the traditional beliefs of many Nigerians have hampered the development of girl education in Nigeria. He went further to submit that many beliefs did not support women's education in Nigeria. Many diverse socio-cultural factors influence the value that parents attach to their daughters' education. Gender norms and stereotypes exclude women and girls from decision-making, community participation and control over their own lives in many areas. Son's preference for access to education is still widespread. As a girl in the North Central said: "Some parents prefer their boys to go to school because only sons inherit and carry on the family name" (Davis, 2008; Mahdi, 2011 in British Council, 2012; Melching, Molly 2012; Ahmad, & Najeemah, 2013)

Early Marriage

The early marriage practices in Nigeria have led to poor representation of female folks in the university system in Nigeria. Women/girls are seen to be more vulnerable to poverty, cultural and societal vices. Empirical evidence shows gender disparity in enrolment, retention and completion at all levels- primary, secondary, and tertiary. In 15 northern states, the disparity in favour of boys is quite high. In the South-East, where boys drop out and engage in income-generating activities to supplement household income the disparity is in the favour of girls. In 2008, 28% of young women aged 15-19 years surveyed for the DHS were currently married, compared to 1% of young men. Among these young women, 12% were married by 15 years of age and 26% were already in a polygamous union with one or more co-wives (NPC, 2009). Among girls surveyed in six Northern States in 2008, 43% cited early marriage as a major obstacle that would prevent them from continuing their schooling and 32% cited pregnancy (ActionAid, 2011). In Gombe and Adamawa States, 60% of girls' withdrawals from primary school were linked to early marriages, which parents considered a religious obligation (Abdulkarim, 2009). In one research study, a girl noted that "girls drop out of school to get married but boys do not because no one will marry them if they are not educated and successful" (Mahdi & Asubiario-Dada in British Council, 2012). As girls leave their natal home after marriage to live with their husband's families, many parents view the education of their daughters as wasted. Early marriage in Nigeria has hindered girl-child development and contributed to gender inequality in most Nigerian communities (British Council, 2014; Olorunda, & Ngunan 2011; Olonade, et al; Omoregie & Abraham, 2009)

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 universities system. National Gender Policy Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006) posited that in Africa including Nigeria, the culture of patriarchy, while not exclusive to these areas has been allowed to infringe very seriously on 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, negative sexual behaviour of men against their spouses and so on. Aina (1998) presented culture as 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. Poverty, gender norms, and traditional practices, including early marriage, increase the risk of premature school dropout (British Council, 2014). Hossen, (2020) and Obasi (2000), poverty and gender-biased tradition operated in the following ways to keep many girls out of school. Before the introduction of the UPE, more girls than boys stayed out of school because of the existence of gender-biased traditions in patriarchal ethnic groups, in which females were considered inferior to males. These patriarchal practices have affected the enrolment of girl children into basic, post-basic and even

tertiary education. The patriarchal practices have also limited the chances of females occupying leadership positions in schools.

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. 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, Ogunode & Ajayi (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.

Poor Access to Educational Opportunities

The poor access to education of women folks in Nigeria has contributed to gender imbalance in the university system in Nigeria. Aina, (2012); Ibrahim & Akudolu (2010); Ikwuegbu, (2022); Ogunode Ezema, & Ayoko (2022) observed that poor access to education and scholarship facilities in various professions are in favour of male than female. Aina noted that these restrictions affected women's access to education and professions, which also limits their capacity to compete effectively with their male counterparts in the labour market for lucrative and more fulfilling jobs. UNICEF (2005) found out that many girls 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 female children to school such as the cost of uniforms and textbooks. For others, the long distance to the nearest school is also a major hindrance. The religious bias of most parents makes them not to send their children, especially girls to school and prefer to send them to Qur'an schools to obtain Islamic education rather than formal schools. Even when children enrolled in school, most of the girls do not finish the primary school level. The reason for this low completion rate includes child labour, economic hardship and early marriage for girls. Bello & Oluwadare (2013); UNICEF (2014) and British Council (2014) submitted that the gender gaps in literacy rates reflect historic and ongoing gaps in enrolment and completion of basic education. Girls have a high risk of dropping out of primary school and overall they are less likely than boys to make the transition to secondary schooling and complete basic school education. UNICEF also noted that poverty, gender norms and traditional practices, including early marriage, increase the risk of premature school dropout. The Gender Parity Index (GPI), the ratio of girls to boys at each level of education, consistently shows fewer girls than boys enrolled in school. Indeed, the majority of out-of-school children are girls. The GPI of the gross enrolment rate declines between primary and junior secondary school. Gender disparities in access to basic education are compounded by regional disparities. 14% more girls of primary school age are enrolled in the South West compared to the North West region. In all southern regions, there is gender parity or over-parity in net enrolments, while a little over two-thirds of the numbers of girls to boys are enrolled in the North West and North East (UNICEF, 2014 and British Council, 2014). Many girls fail to make the transition to junior secondary school for a range of educational, economic and socio-cultural reasons. An over-age start 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 (British Council, 2014). In a study conducted by 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.

Weak Institutions

There are institutions established and saddled with the responsibility of implementing gender policies at all levels of public and private institutions in Nigeria. National Gender Policy, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006) asserted that the National Gender Policy puts in place both institutional and operational frameworks that are to ensure that all gender equality imperatives are effectively implemented. The Gender Management System (GMS), with its 4 pillars – enabling environment; GMS structures; GMS Mechanisms and GMS processes - is adopted for the management of the gender equality framework. Importantly, the responsibility for gender equality is that of all government agencies, line ministries, state and community apparatuses as well as the civil society and the private sector. However, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and its organs (both at the Federal, State, and Local Government levels) have responsibility for the effective coordination of all gender equality and women empowerment institutions, and the implementation of gender equality and women empowerment programmes and activities. The majority of public institutions saddled with the responsibilities of ensuring full implementation of gender policies in private and public institutions like the universities are weak in carrying out their mandate (Ogunode & Ahmed & Yahaya 2021). National Gender Policy, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006) observed the inadequate power and capacity of the national women's machinery to solely take on the responsibility for effecting gender equality in all sectors. Many problems seen to confront the Ministry include the low technical capacity of its core staff, lack of an established framework that employs and retains gender specialists in the ministry, poor funding and large reliance on development partners, giving rise to concerns about the sustainability of programmes. Also, the poor perception of gender among other government agencies especially the core policy agencies does not give rise to the proper orientation to addressing the demands and needs of the Ministry. Similarly, the framework for implementation is weakened by the poor integration with the macro-policy framework.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper looked at gender imbalance in Nigerian University System with the view of analyzing the factors responsible for the gender imbalance in the universities in Nigeria. The paper concluded that poor implementation of gender policies, cultural factors, socio-economic status of parents, traditional beliefs, early marriage, poor funding of female education, poor access to educational opportunities, weak institutions and patriarchal practices are the factors that have contributed to gender imbalance in the university system in Nigeria. Based on these factors, the paper hereby recommended the following;

1. The government should ensure gender policies are implemented in all the administration and management of the university system in Nigeria.
2. The government should challenge all discriminatory gender norms, patriarchal practices, beliefs, early marriage practices and stereotypes that curtail girls' education and girls' educational attainment in Nigeria through public enlightening programmes.
3. The government should remove or reduce the costs of education for parents and families living in poverty this will help significantly in increasing girls' enrolment, retention and completion of basic, secondary schools and higher institutions.
4. The government at every level should increase investment in women's education.
5. The government should establish more educational institutions to create more access to females in various institutions. The government should institutionalize incentives to increase girls' enrolment in Nigeria schools
6. Universities should not discriminate against lecturing job applicants based on gender;

7. Women or girls pursuing university education should be encouraged with bursaries and scholarships by governments, well-meaning private entities and individuals. This may motivate others to follow suit;

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