

## **Contributions of Women Academics to the Development of Tertiary Education in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** This study explores the impacts of women academics on the advancement of tertiary education. Utilizing secondary data from both print and online sources, the research underscores the substantial contributions made by women academics in Nigerian tertiary institutions which include among others; teaching, research, community service, and the provision of effective leadership. However, the paper highlights obstacles such as inadequate implementation of gender policies, limited representation of women academics, institutional weaknesses, culture, religion, early marriage and patriarchy, all of which hinder the optimal engagement of women academics in tertiary institutions. In light of these findings, the study recommends affording women academics increased opportunities for responsibilities and leadership roles to further enhance their contributions.

**Keywords:** Academics, Development, Education, Women in Tertiary Institutions.

### **Introduction**

Tertiary education or higher education covers a wider range of higher learning institutions like the polytechnics, colleges of education, monotronics and the universities. These tertiary institutions could be organized in different ways, commonly within a university and in a separate institution as university and other institutions of higher learning (Alemu, 2018). Tertiary education is the final stage of education that handles the production of manpower for the social, economic and technological development of a country. Tertiary education is an organized education that deals with intensive teaching, research and provision of community services (Akin-Ibidiran, Ogunode & Ibidiran John 2022).

Federal Republic of Nigeria's national policy on education (2013) observed that tertiary education is an education given after Post Basic Education (PBE) Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) as well as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), Colleges of Education, Monotronics and Polytechnics. Tertiary institutions are microcosms of the larger society. Tertiary institution is an organized fraction of the whole society curved out for teaching programme, research and provision of community service. Tertiary institution can also be seen as a subset of the general society that is made of collection of different people, culture, life style and values (Ogunode & Odo 2023).

Tertiary institutions consist of both academic and non-academic staff, prominently feature women academics who, as professionals, contribute significantly to teaching, research, community services, and the promotion of women's education. Organizations like the National Association of Women Academic (NAWACS) and the Women Educators Association of Nigeria support these objectives (Ogunode et al., 2022; Adams et al., 2022; Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022).

The cardinal goals of women in academia encompass implementing teaching programmes, executing research initiatives, providing community services, and advocating for gender policies (Ogunode et al., 2022; Adams et al., 2022). Supported by various organizations, such as NAWACS and UWA, women academics play pivotal roles in research development, educational event organization, and safeguarding women's interests within tertiary institutions (Ogunode et al., 2022; Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022; Olatunde-Aiyedun et al., 2021).

Recognizing these crucial contributions, this paper aims to discuss the specific roles of women academics in the development of Nigerian tertiary institutions.

### **Contributions of Women Academic to the Development of Tertiary education in Nigeria**

Women in academics or women academics in Nigerian tertiary institutions has contributed immensely to the development of tertiary education in the areas of teaching, research, community service and provision of quality leadership.

#### **Teaching Programme Development**

Women academic in Nigerian tertiary institutions has contributed to teaching programme in the higher institutions. Teaching programme is the first cardinal programme of the tertiary institutions. Teaching programme is accorded with much respect because of its roles in the tertiary institutions (Ogunode & Ndayebom, 2022). Teaching programme is one of the indicators employed in measuring tertiary institutions performance. Academic staff employed in the tertiary institutions are saddled with the responsibilities of teaching and examinations management. Women academics over the years have proven their qualities and styles in the teaching profession. National universities commission in 2019 estimated that 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). These women in academics in time past and present are contributing to development of teaching. Women academics have engaged in various researches that their findings and recommendations have been used to improve teaching programme in the tertiary institutions. Some research recommendations have been used to formulate policies and programme that has enhanced the development of tertiary education in Nigeria.

#### **Research Development**

Women academics in Nigerian tertiary institutions have demonstrated great passion for research development. They have contributed immensely to research development in the various higher institutions. Ogunode & Ade, (2023) noted that research programme in the tertiary institutions is vital to socio-economic development of the nation. Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, & Ajape (2020) described research programme as the second most ranked programmes in the higher institutions. For instance, Tribune (2019) observed that two Nigerian female scientists, Mercy Epitope Bankole and Funmilola Fagbola, were among the 20 female researchers honoured with the 2019 Young Talents Awards for Sub-Saharan Africa on Friday, November 22, 2019 in Dakar, Senegal. Mercy Bankole is a post-doctoral researcher at the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State. She majors in Chemistry, with a research project on 'Healing open wounds faster and better thanks to a nanocomposite. Funmilola Fagbola bagged a B.Tech and M.Tech degrees in Computer Science of the Department of Computer Science & Engineering, LAUTECH Ogbomoso in 2010 and 2017, respectively. She is a currently a doctoral

student in the same university. The award, sponsored jointly by the Foundation L'Oréal and UNESCO for Women in Science programme, was part of the 10th edition of its regional programme for Women in Science. The number of women in science is not yet significant: only 2.4 per cent of the world's researchers are African scientists, of whom 30 per cent are women. For her doctoral research, which she commenced in the 2018/2019 academic session, she is investigating how nature-inspired deep learning models could be developed for misinformation detection in online social networks. This intensive research, being ably supervised by Professor Stephen Olatunde Olabiyisi, is strongly motivated by the rising trend in the use of social media and associated technologies to spread lies, propaganda, rumours, fake news and other related unverifiable contents, which in turn, have its significant contributions to the growing cases of abuse of drug use, socio-economic and political instabilities, global high mortality rate, high government spending, suicide, communal crisis, war threats, global terrorism among others. Prof. Ikeoluwapo Ajayi has been awarded the prize. Internationally, Nduka Otiono, a Nigerian-Canadian academic and former journalist at The Guardian, has emerged one of the winners of the 2023 Faculty of Arts and social sciences (FASS) Research Excellence Award (REA) at Carleton University, Canada. Otiono, who is the Director of the university's Institute of African Studies (IAS), was awarded for his exemplary research work. Sasrappoter (2019) report that Professor Francisca Okeke, the first female Head of Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka bagged the 2013 Laureate award for her significant contributions "to the understanding of daily variations of the ion currents in the upper atmosphere which may further our understanding of climate change." UNESCO says Professor Okeke has made the study of the ionosphere her lifetime work. The ionosphere lies between 50km and 1000kms above the earth surface. "A very thick layer of charged particles, the ionosphere produces changes in the magnetic field on earth's surface that affect the planet in a host of ways. Her research could lead to a better understanding of climate change and help pinpoint sources of dramatic phenomena like tsunamis and earthquakes", a summary of her research published by UNESCO read. She was the only recipient in that category from Africa and the Arab nations and the third Nigerian Laureate since the UNESCO-L'Oréal partnership was established in 1998. Professor Okeke got a prize of \$100,000. Also, Professor Folasade Ogunsola has contributed to research development in Nigeria. Her research centered on the regulation and management of viral diseases, particularly HIV. She is the principal investigator at the AIDS Prevention Initiative in Nigeria at the University of Lagos. She has also been the chairman of the Infection Control Committee of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital. This is in addition to being the chairman of the National Association of Colleges of Medicine in Nigeria (Punch 2022). Women in academics in Nigeria have excelled in the fields of mathematics, physics, chemistry, medicine, engineering etc. Legit (2023) reported that a Nigerian scholar from Kwara State University (KWASU) has received a prestigious international scholarship grant worth 24,000 Canadian dollars. Dr Rashidat Akande, works in the Department of Economics and Development Studies, was selected as one of the recipients of the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship - Advanced Scholars- West Africa (QES-AS-WA) scheme for 2023.

### **Community Service**

Community service is the third cardinal programme of the tertiary education. Community service programme involves an organized programme of activities carried out by stakeholders in the tertiary institutions in the host communities, state and country at large with the purpose of providing community development. Community service programme is an organized and planned service programme of higher institutions for the benefit and betterment of their host community. Community service programme of higher institutions are community inclined services initiated by the institutions to develop the communities. Community service of higher institution are services provided by institutions to benefit the community people. Community service are essential services that academia carries out to solving a pressing problem in the society. Academic staff are saddled with carrying out the defined functions in their respective society.

Women in academics in Nigeria have contributed to community service development (Ogunode, Audu & Olatunde-Aiyedun, 2022).

Women in academics have in different time engaged in community services that have helped to impact the communities positively. For instance, Prof Oti has spent over 34 years in academics, teaching research and administration within and outside Nigeria. She has contributed to community development programme. Her practical experience working as a consultant to the government and private sector at various times in diverse capacities has made her contribute lots to all the aforementioned organizations. She has worked and contributed to development of Tertiary Education Trust Fund, Anambra, Imo, River Basin Development Authority, and the National Biotechnology Development Agency. She has written over 65 academic papers, 40 seminar and workshop papers, edited a handbook, given over 50 public lectures, and authored over 10 technical reports for the Federal Government (Punch 2022). Another great women academia is Prof. Ogunsola. She has contributed a lot to community development programme in the areas of disease prevention and management in Nigeria. Punch (2023) averred that, Ogunsola had expressed concern about disease prevention and control in Nigeria. She identified poor hygiene and overuse of antibiotics as practices that foster antimicrobial-drug resistance. Proffering a solution, she maintained that, “sustained infection prevention and control infrastructure and programmes should be built around a set of core components, which include guidelines, training, surveillance, and multimodal strategies for implementing IPC, monitoring and evaluation.” In one of the interview, she stated that the way to reducing the 58 per cent unemployment rate in the country was for Nigerian graduates to begin innovating ideas that will enhance human lives. She also noted that knowledge in itself was not sufficient, but its application in an appropriate manner to better mankind and enhance the livelihood of others was what youths should be concerned about. She was a founding member of the Nigerian Society for Infection control in 1998, and is also a member of the Global Infection Prevention and Control Network. The microbiologist was the acting vice-chancellor of the University of Lagos for some time in 2020 when the university was embroiled in a crisis as a result of the removal of the then vice chancellor, Prof Oluwatoyin Ogundipe, by the university’s governing council. Before then, she was the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Development Services) of the university. At a time, she was also the provost of the College of Medicine, University of Lagos (Punch 2022).

### **Provision of Quality Leadership**

Women in academic in Nigeria has demonstrated their leadership skills and knowledge in piloting the affairs of various tertiary institutions in Nigeria to greatness. Many women in academic have been appointed and elected to manager and administer tertiary institutions in time past and present. Women are flexible and empathetic. They are also good builders, good listeners, good communicators and emotionally intelligent. The Nation observed that in the world of academia, some women who have been entrusted with leading roles to manage human and material resources have more often than not, proved that given adequate backing, they can perform creditably. Over the years, women have shown that they are great leaders. Studies and experience have shown that women bring unique perspectives to leadership roles. **The Nation** presents some of Nigeria’s most excellent amazons that are making invaluable contributions to the world of academics as female Vice-Chancellors. In no particular order, they are: Prof. Lilian Salami – UNIBEN, Prof. Florence Obi – UNICAL, Prof Nnenna Oti – FUTO, Prof Ibiyemi Bello – LASU, Prof Kaletapwa Farauta – ADSU, Prof. Adenike Oladiji – FUTA, Prof. Folasade Ogunsola – UNILAG and Prof. Bidemi Lafiaji-Okuneye – LASUED. The Nation observed that Prof. Lilian Salami is the 10th substantive vice-chancellor of the University of Benin, Edo State. A home economist and former Dean of the Faculty of Education, Salami became the second female vice-chancellor of the institution after Grace Alele Williams, who was also the first female vice-chancellor in Nigeria. She was elected as the chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors of Nigerian Federal Universities. With her appointment, Salami became the second female to occupy the position. Many women in academics as academic leaders in various

institutions in Nigeria have ensured improvement in the internally generated revenue of their universities; they prioritized staff and students' welfare; intensified capacity building and staff development in areas of teaching and research. Women academic have also ensured quality and sound policies that have aided development of their institutions, they had formulated policies that deepen research; enhanced students' experience on campus; ensure sustainable peace, security, and community involvement; expand the university; create new academic programmes; infrastructural development; and positively impact the host community. It may appear a difficult task, but I am confident that with your support, we can meet our target and even surpass it.

### **Barriers to Effective Contributions of Women Academic to Tertiary Education in Nigeria**

There are factors militating against women academics contributions to the development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Some of these factors includes; poor implementation of gender policies, few women academics, weak institution, culture, religion, early marriage and patriarchy.

#### **Poor Implementation of Gender Policy**

The poor implementation of gender policy on appointment of leaders in the universities in Nigeria has led to low representation of female academics as Vice-Chancellors in the Universities. Ogunode and Salman (2023) argued that the Nigerian government has been reluctant to implement laws to improve gender equality in politics despite a formal/oral support for it. There are no formal bars on women taking office and the Nigerian constitution (1999) guarantees equal political rights. The (National Gender Policy 2006) recommended a benchmark of 35% of seats in parliament to be filled by women. The country is also a signatory to international agreements. The government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 and endorsed the 2005 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Kelly 2019; British Council Nigeria, 2012; Denney, 2011; Nigeria Freedom House, 2019). Also Ogunode and Salman (2023) stated 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 university managers and administrators gave males the upper hand in the occupation of leadership positions of the universities than the female folks.

#### **Few Women Academics**

The university system in Nigeria is male dominated and this has given the male academics the opportunities to dominate the leadership positions in most of the universities in Nigeria. There are few female academics in the university system (Ekwukoma, 2018). In terms of staffing in Nigerian university system, NUC (2019), record a total of 73,443 academic staff, 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).The wide gap has reduced the population of the female academics in most of the Nigerian universities.

#### **Weak Institutions**

The federal government has established some agencies to ensure full implementation of gender policies in all public and private institutions but most of these agencies are very weak in carrying

out their mandates. (Ogunode and Salman 2023), ascertained that 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 four pillars enabling environment: GMS structures, GMS Mechanisms and GMS processes was 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 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.

### **Patriarchal Practice**

The patriarchal practice in Nigerian society has also contributed to the poor representation of female academics into Vice-Chancellorship appointments in Nigerian universities. Oluyemi, (Undated) viewed patriarchy as a society ruled and dominated by men over women which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to seek for political positions. Ogunode and Salman (2023) maintained that patriarchal practice inherent in the Nigerian community has contributed to the low representation of women in universities. This patriarchal practice has also influenced enrolment and admission into schools and other related activities in the universities system. World Bank (2005); National Gender Policy, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006); Ndiyo (2011); Nakpodia and Urien (2012); Lawan and Muhammed (2014); posited that in Africa, particularly Nigeria, patriarchy, has been allowed to infringe very seriously on human rights of women, socialisation 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 behaviours of men against their spouses and so on.

Other factors militating against women academic contribution in the tertiary institutions include; cultural factor, religion factors and early marriage. On cultural factor, Olaogun, Adebayo, and Oluyemo, (2015) Kainuwa & Yusuf (2013) noted Cultural practices serve as hindrance to girl-child education and that inaccessibility of the girl-child to education makes her vulnerable to diseases such as HIV/AIDS, early marriage, denial of rights and child labour. On, religion factors Arubayi (2009); Adegun, (2012); Olaogun, Adebayo, and Oluyemo (2015) identified religion as a problem and they opined that the various religions in Nigeria subscribe to the idea that the man is head of the family and has greater control and decision making powers. Almost all religions in Nigeria actually preach in favour of women absolute domestic role. That is women should be absolutely at home to care for their children and husband without external engagements. The religious teachings held that a woman is the weaker vessel and plays the second fiddle in marriage relationship and as such, the woman is taught to be subservient to the man.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, this research explored the substantial contributions of women academics to the advancement of tertiary education in Nigerian institutions. The findings underscore the significant impact of women academics across teaching, research, community service, and the provision of quality leadership within tertiary education. However, inadequate implementation of gender policies, limited representation of women academics, institutional weaknesses, cultural and religious constraints, early marriage, and patriarchal practices have been identified as impediments to their effective contributions. In the light of these challenges, it is recommended

that, concerted efforts be made to provide increased opportunities for women academics, particularly in terms of responsibilities and leadership roles. These recommendations aim to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment, ultimately enhancing the overall contributions of women academics to the development of tertiary institutions.

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