

Gender Equality in Tertiary Institutions: Importance and Barriers

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Abstract

This paper discussed the concept of gender equality and the concept of tertiary education. Specifically, the paper looked at the significance of gender equality in tertiary institutions. Secondary data were used employed for the paper. The secondary data were sorted from print and online publications. This paper concluded that gender equality will lead to; the development of teaching programmes, research programmes; community services programmes, improvement in the national and international ranking of tertiary institutions, manpower development and provision of good leadership and governance in the tertiary institutions. The paper also pointed out that poor implementation of gender policy, early marriage, socio-economic status of parents, traditional beliefs, patriarchal practice and poor access to educational opportunities are barriers to gender equality in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Based on these pointed problems, the paper suggested the following; implementation of gender policies, seminars, conferences and workshops must be conducted to enlighten tertiary institutions and students about the importance of gender equality in an academic environment. Tertiary institutions Managers should ensure to maintain and implement an inclusive and diverse environment that is respectful and assign roles and responsibilities for both men and women.

Keywords- gender equality, tertiary education, development, women

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education is an organized educational institution that is structured to focus on teaching, researching and promotion of community service. Isife & Nneka (2016), note that tertiary institutions play a vital role not only in shaping the future by educating the professionals of tomorrow but also creating research-based sustainability efforts and providing outreach and

service to communities and nations. Historically, higher education has served the twin purpose of research and teaching. In its knowledge production function, higher education institutions have been the centres of innovation and creators of new knowledge in diverse fields of human activity. The knowledge production function is based on academic rigour and the intellectual apparatus within higher education institutions. Over decades, such an intellectual apparatus has contributed to the establishment of orthodoxy around the meaning and epistemology of knowledge. This orthodoxy has been associated with the privileging of intellectual activity within higher education institutions over any such activity in society itself.

Ogunode (2020) defined tertiary education as the post-secondary school education designed for the production of manpower. Higher education is an education that awards certificates after the completion of the programme. Tertiary education is education that deals with teaching programmes, research programmes and community service programmes. Higher education is the peak of educational institutions and it is an organized educational system that is meant to support the social, economic and political development of the country (Ogunode, 2020). Federal Republic of Nigeria's national policy on education (2013), observed tertiary education is an education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI). Adeyemi (2001), defined higher education as a system which embraces much of the country's research capacity and reproduces the majority of the skilled professionals that are required in the labour market.

Gender equality in tertiary institutions is a sign of positive development. By nature and population, women should be fully represented in all aspects of the tertiary institution structure. Nigeria's development record and its demographic composition suggest a need for the active involvement of women in teaching, researching and provision of community service in tertiary institutions. There is a clear indication that women form the majority in Nigeria. Women's participation in tertiary institutions programmes will help in the transformation of the institutions and the nation entirely. Women should be equally represented in the activities, programmes and leadership of tertiary institutions. Oluyemi (n.d), noted that under international standards, both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities in everything worldwide, most especially to participate fully in all aspects and at all levels of academic activities and processes within the academic environment. Globally, women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute in vital ways to societal development generally. In most societies, women assume some key roles, which are: mother, producer, home manager, community organizer, sociocultural and political activist. Of these many roles mentioned, the last has been engendered by the women's movement. In developed countries, women have maximum opportunities to participate in teaching, researching and leadership in academic institutions and their participation has led to the development of the institutions. It is imperative to discuss the importance of gender equality.

Concept of Gender Equality

Before considering the concept of gender equality, is very important to give a brief definition of the concept of gender. According to USAID (2010), gender encompasses the economic, political, and socio-cultural attributes, constraints, and opportunities associated with being male or female.

As a social construct, gender varies across cultures and over time, gender roles should not be

assumed but should be investigated. This is because, as gender varies, the roles also vary, depending on the society. Equality is relational, it is an open political concept filled with various interpretations and meanings. The term gender according to UNFPA (2005) refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most societies, being a man or a woman is not simply a matter of different biological and physical characteristics. Men and women face different expectations about how they should dress, behave or work. Relations between men and women, whether in the family, the workplace or the public sphere, also reflect an understanding of the talents, characteristics and behaviour appropriate to women and men. Gender thus differs from sex in that it is social and cultural rather than biological. Gender attributes and characteristics, encompassing, inter alia, the roles that men and women play and the expectations placed upon them, vary widely among societies and change over time.

Gender equality according to Amadi, (2017), is a condition in which males and females have equal opportunity to access societal resources. Equality between the genders can be derived by politically empowering men and women in the democratic process (Amadi, 2017). Wikipedia (2023) defined gender equality as the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making; and the state of valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender.

From the above, Gender equality can be defined as a state of equal gender power relations, disempowerment, poverty, and lack of adequate access to political and socio-economic opportunities between men and women. Gender equality is a social system that ensures a balance allocation of opportunities for both males and females in any socio-economic and political engagement. Gender equality is an act to ensure equal rights to quality education, health, and employment for all men and women in a given society. Gender equality is aimed to ensure that girls and boys, women and men, access, complete and are equally empowered through quality education. Gender equality is the position that ensures that the social need, interests, and priorities of both women and men and girls and boys are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups and that all human beings are free to develop their abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes. *Gender equality is aimed to eliminate inequalities of rights between men and women, promoting a culture of equity and dealing with the different types of violence and discrimination.*

Empowerment and equality in tertiary institutions is a central element for building and consolidating the development of teaching, researching and provision of community service. Nigeria's tertiary institutions cannot be an exception in gender-inclusive programmes. The quality of governance improves in various tertiary institutions with more women participating in decision making. Gender according to Oluyem, (undated) is a socially determined quality linked to women and men. This influences how roles are assigned in each society. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged concerning decision-making and access to economic and social resources.

In Nigeria, the Nigerian National Gender Policy was adopted officially in 2006, by the Federal Executive Council. This course of action was taken with the intent and purpose of solving the problem of women's disempowerment, feminine poverty, gender inequality, and underdevelopment in the country. The goal of the National Gender Policy (NGP), is to eradicate poverty, achieve equality of the gender, and encourage inclusiveness in the process of

governance and development. Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions this is a growing concern to many Nigerians. However, concerted efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organizations to increase the level of participation of women in politics, education, and health in line, with the declaration made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action. However, in Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions respectively (Oluyemi, n.d).

Importance of Gender Equality in Tertiary Institutions

Gender equality in tertiary institutions will lead to; the development of teaching programmes, research programmes; community services programmes, improvement in a national and international ranking of tertiary institutions, manpower development and provision of good leadership and governance.

Development of Teaching Programme

Gender equality in tertiary institutions will lead to the development of teaching programmes in tertiary institutions. When women are given more representation in higher institutions, it will help to develop the teaching programme in the institutions. The teaching programme is one of the cardinal programmes in the tertiary institutions. The teaching programme is one of the crucial indicators used for measuring tertiary institutions' performance (Ogunode, & Ndayebom, 2022). Teaching programme entails the act of impacting organized instruction to the students to make the students more useful to their communities. Teaching programmes in Nigerian tertiary institutions required more hands. Equal representation of men and women in the various institutions will help to solve the problem of shortage of teaching staff as mentioned (NUC, 2021; Ogunode, 2020). When women are given more opportunities in the tertiary institutions there will be more women in the teaching profession in the tertiary institutions. Inequality against women in tertiary institutions is a constraint to the progress of academic institutions because it limits the opportunities of one-half of its population. When women are constrained from reaching their full potential in the areas of teaching programmes, that potential is lost to the institutions and the country at large. Gender equality in tertiary institutions will increase teaching capacity. Gender equality will enhance and promote development in teaching methodology through increased research by women academics. Gender equality in higher education is important for empowering women in academics. Gender equality in tertiary institutions has a positive impact on the macroeconomic and financial stability of women academic in the social. Gender equality in tertiary can stimulate teaching development by increasing the number of educated and skilled women in the academic environment. Academi. College (undated) found out that most females love teaching and they are into the profession mostly by choice. Females are expressive hence they show them like and dislikes easily. The most appreciable characteristic of a female is that they are multitasking. They can handle the class, teach, pay attention to each one and empathize with the students.

Development of Research

Equal representation of men and women in tertiary institutions will also develop the research capacity of the tertiary institutions. The research programme is the second most ranked programme of the tertiary institutions. Research according to Ogunode (2022) is a systematic investigation of a pressing problem to find a solution for the betterment of society. Research is carried out by all levels of academics in tertiary institutions (Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, &

Ajape, 2020). Academia is saddled with the responsibilities of carrying out research and sharing the findings within and outside the country. More opportunities for women in tertiary institutions will guarantee the development of research in the institutions. Research has shown that many women in the academic world have excelled in groundbreaking cut-edge research that has made remarkable influence at both national and international levels. Increment in the number of women in academic in tertiary institutions will enhance increment in research output. Opportunities for more women academics in tertiary institutions will increase women researchers in the academic environment. Gender equality in academics will increase research income and research development in tertiary institutions. It leads to more secure, resilient societies that allow all people, especially women and men, to reach their full potential in the research world. Gender equality ensures protection for women in a research environment and encouraged them to pursue courses and vocations in which they are under-represented, including those in which they are under-represented. Gender equality increases the lifetime earnings of women researchers considerably. The pace of national growth is increasing through gender equality in tertiary institutions because both men and women have the medium to exploit their potential fully. The number of women in research will increase. A study concluded that female academics made contributions that are more significant to research and that the Nigerian university system needs to develop strategies to enhance female research output.

Community Services Development

Gender equality in tertiary institutions will help to improve the provision of community service. Community service is the third cardinal programme of tertiary institutions. As observed by Ogunode, Audu, & Olatunde-Aiyedun, (2022) Community service programme is the third cardinal programme of tertiary institutions. A community service programme is an organized and planned service programme of higher institutions for the benefit and betterment of their host community. Community service programmes of higher institutions are community-inclined services initiated by the institutions to develop the communities. Community services of higher institutions are services provided by institutions to benefit the community people. Community service provision by the academia of tertiary institutions has helped to foster development in rural areas and cities. Gender equality in tertiary institutions will help to increase the provision of community service because women are naturally passionate about the social development of the communities. Research has shown that more women are involved in community services and the provision of social services in their respective communities than men. In modern tertiary institutions, women especially have a vital role to play in the development of community service. This is so because women constitute half of the population in any institution. They are homemakers and or the heart of the family, they promote social, cultural and fundamental values of a society and permanent change is often best achieved through them. Full community development is not possible without their understanding, cooperation and effective participation (Adaralegbe, (2006). Gender equality in tertiary institutions will help to increase the number of community service providers in which women in the past and present are playing significant roles. Gender equality will ensure the equitable distribution of research on community issues and pressing challenges. Gender equality will lead to an increment in knowledge transfer among the communities and society at large because one woman is empowered, and many are also empowered. Women have a means of passing information that will reach many places. Dahle (undated) noted that social work, on the other hand, is a female professional project, where women constitute a vast majority of the professionals.

Manpower Development

Gender equality in the distribution of men and women in tertiary institutions will guarantee the development of manpower. The tertiary institutions are saddled with the responsibility of producing different categories of skilled and professional men and women in the country to aid socio-economic and technological development. Women are good teachers and mentors. Women are capable of teaching and teaching with a passion that will aid the production of quality graduates. Research showed that women are good teachers than men because women show more care, love and affection than men teachers. Gender equality produces social gains and economic gains. Educated women attract more women to the academic environment. Gender equality will increase the number of academics in tertiary institutions and this will help to solve the problem of shortage of academic staff and increase the quality of tertiary education. Gender equality in tertiary institutions will help to provide an academic environment without discrimination and will help to create a positive image of the institutions. Gender equality will help to draw more women into the academic environment. This will lead to more educated women. Peter (2019) noted that educated women involve in more productive economic activities and contribute their quota to nation-building. The economic advancement and empowerment of women has enabled them to achieve their personal and family goal such as participation in partisan politics and educating their children. They will be in a better position to check early marriage on the part of their daughters, malnutrition, mental instability, indiscipline, adolescent delinquency, secret cult, arm robbery and other social ills plaguing the country (Hauwa, 2005). Brown (1991), noted that the acquisition of formal and non-formal types of mathematics, science and technology education will enable women to contribute to national development, be independent, have improved relationships with their husbands and in dealing with many problems confronting their families.

Provision of Good Leadership

Good leadership and governance will be guaranteed in various tertiary institutions when gender equality is fully in place in the institutions. Ogunode (2022) opined that higher institutions are designed to operate with academic leaders who oversee all the activities in the institutions. The leaders in higher institutions are called academic leaders. They are appointed and elected to manage and direct the affairs of the institutions. Using the university as a model. The internal managers and administrators of the universities include; Vice Chancellors, Deans, Directors, and Heads of Departments. They are saddled with the responsibility of managing and directing the affairs of the system. Women are found to be good at leadership than men. Gender equality in tertiary institutions will guarantee women in academic in top academic leadership positions. This will provide opportunities for women to make policies and come up with programmes that will help to protect other women in an academic environment. Gender equality in tertiary institutions will help to ensure the equitable distribution of academic leaders in different leadership positions. When women are well represented in the various tertiary institutions and are well appointed into various leadership position there is possibilities for good governance and provision of quality leadership. There is also the possibility of defending other women and girls that are under intimidation and sexual harassment. Gender equality will create an academic environment that other institutions will emulate. A study conducted by Eagly revealed that women make better leaders because women tend to be more *transformational* leaders — meaning that they seek to develop others and listen more effectively, in addition to generally thinking more outside the box than their male counterparts. World Economic Forum's(undated), noted that the top skills needed to be successful as a leader of tomorrow are emotional intelligence (EQ), empathy, listening skills, coaching and mentoring, and innovation/creativity. Research has also shown us that women

tend to be better at using these skills (i.e., “soft skills) than men (Training, 2020). Also, scientific studies have consistently shown that on most of the key traits that make leaders more effective, women tend to outperform men. For example, humility, self-awareness, self-control, moral sensitivity, social skills, emotional intelligence, kindness, and a pro-social and moral orientation are all more likely to be found in women than men.

Improvement in National and International Ranking of Tertiary Institutions

Equal gender representation in tertiary institutions will help to improve the ranking of tertiary institutions and present such institutions as gender sensitive. When women are properly represented in the various tertiary institutions it will create a balance of institutions that will promote development in policies, governance and development.

Barriers to Gender Equality in Tertiary Institutions

Many factors have prevented gender equality in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Some of the factors; poor implementation of gender policy, early marriage, socio-economic status of parents, traditional beliefs, patriarchal practice and poor access to educational opportunities.

Poor implementation of gender policy

Poor implementation of various gender policies in Nigerian educational institutions especially the tertiary institutions has accounted for poor representation in every aspect of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Edinoh, Odili, & Nwafor (2023) acknowledged poor implementation of gender policy on admission, recruitment and in the selection of academic leaders has resulted in gender imbalance in most tertiary institutions Specifically, Ogunode & Salman, (2022) observed that 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 & Salman, 2022). Ogunode & Ahmed (2021) noted that 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 the 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) and Deji (2016) 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.

Early Marriage

The early marriage practices in Nigeria have led to few girls getting admission into tertiary institutions and this has also led to few manpower development of female folks. This problem has reduced the number of women employed in tertiary institutions across the country. Early marriage has limited many women's opportunities in the labour market. Empirical evidence shows gender disparity in enrolment, retention and completion at all levels- primary, secondary, and tertiary (Dada, Ogunode, & Ajayi, 2022; Ogunode Ahmed, & Yahaya 2021). For example, in 15 northern states of Nigeria, 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). Early marriage practice in Nigeria has served as a barrier to gender equality in tertiary institutions.

Socio-Economic Status of Parents

The economic status of many Nigerian parents has resulted in gender inequality in various tertiary institutions. Many Nigerians cannot afford to sponsor their wards to tertiary institutions because of the high cost involved. Ogunode, Lawan & Yusuf (2021), noted 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 (Ogunode, et al 2022). UNICEF (2005), discovered 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) found out 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.

Traditional beliefs

The traditional beliefs in Nigeria have a relationship with the gender imbalance in some Nigerian tertiary institutions. Hassan (2011), did a study on 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 the gender gap in science and technology courses in Nigeria Ogunode, et al (2022) and Ikwuegbu, (2022) maintained 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. Traditional beliefs as served as barriers to gender equality in many tertiary institutions because most of the traditional practices prevent the girl child from education.

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) 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, negative sexual behaviour 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 Access to Educational Opportunities

Ogunode, et al (2022) noted that the poor access to education for women folks in Nigeria has contributed to gender imbalance in the university system in Nigeria. Ibrahim & Akudolu (2010); Aina, (2012); Ogunode Ezema, & Ayoko (2022), maintained that poor access to education and scholarship facilities in various professions is in favour of males than females. 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 send their children, especially girls to school and prefer to send them to Qur'an schools to obtain Islamic education rather than formal schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper discussed the concept of gender equality and the concept of tertiary. Specifically, the paper looked at the significance of gender equality in tertiary institutions. This paper concluded that gender equality will lead to; the development of teaching programmes, research programmes; community services programmes, improvement in national and international ranking of tertiary institutions, manpower development and provision of good leadership and governance. The paper also pointed out that poor implementation of gender policy, early marriage, socio-economic status of parents, traditional beliefs, patriarchal practice and poor access to educational opportunities are barriers to gender equality in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Based on these problems, the paper suggested the following;

1. Tertiary institutions managers should ensure full implementation of gender policies on admission, recruitment and appointment of academic leaders,
2. National Universities Commission should organize seminars, conferences and workshops for managers of tertiary institutions on the need to accord priority gender equality policy implementation in their respective institutions;
3. Tertiary institutions Managers should ensure to maintain and implement an inclusive and diverse environment that respects and assign roles and responsibilities for both men and women.

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