



GENDER AND THE ACADEMY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The fact that there is gender imbalance at work and across social institutions particularly relative to value sharing in societies is no longer new. Women have somewhat experienced gender opportunities restrictions and ceiling across societies and down the ages. What is problematic however is the consistency and persistence of the imbalance even when change is constant. The academy as the citadel of learning and a point of convergence for societal barometer expected to sometimes respond to developments in unique ways has unfortunately been affected by gender imbalances. This article therefore explored the trajectories of gender patterns in the Nigerian university system to further the interrogation of the problematic for fresh insights, as well as change comprehension and projection.

Key Words: *Gender, Academy, Gender imbalance, Social Institutions Gender mainstreaming*

INTRODUCTION

The role of women in nation building can never be underestimated. In fact, this is why the issue of role of women in nation building and international development has continued to attract global attention especially relative to the nexus of gender equality and sustainable development (see Akanle and Olutayo, 2012, Akanle, 2011). Consequently, issues bordering on inequality and inequity are often addressed, as well as all forms of discrimination against women (Adegun, 2012, Akanle and Olutayo, 2012, Akanle, 2011). Unfortunately, higher institutions experience gender disparity relative to opportunities in societies. It is thus regrettable that the citadels of learning, that is, higher institutions that are expected to play a proactive role in achieving the goals of equality of opportunity in the society are also facing the acute problem of gender inequity in respect of overall representation of women in academic and administrative positions in the system. It is important to note that the higher institutions are not to be blamed uncritically as the institutions are also part of the society in which they operate and are fed by the societies just as they feed the society. It is however necessary to interrogate the trajectories of gender disparity in higher institutions to understand the manifestations of earlier discriminations against women in society and the possibility and consequences of the perpetuation of the problem in manners they will endure and impact the society.

Sex imbalance is a natural phenomenon but gender is not. Once sex is socially constructed with value embeddedness it becomes gender and there the problems lie (Adebayo and Kolawole, 2013, Akanle, 2011, Waylen, 1998). Gender discrimination is in every society but problematization is common in Africa with its patriarchal system having absolute dangerous implications also manifesting in institutions of higher learning as will be demonstrated in this article. While a number of efforts have been underway to rectify gender imbalance, much still



remains to be done across all educational sectors. There seem to be a natural gender role distinction all over the world, which has created gap opportunities between men and women (Nwajiuba, 2011). This trend has recently become of great concern to many who are agitating that women should be given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to development and be part of policy-making bodies. Thus, women have become the focus of international programmes and conferences aimed at integrating them into the development process on an equal basis with men. Within the past three decades, the United Nations organized World Conferences on Women in Mexico City (in 1975), Copenhagen (in 1980), Nairobi (in 1985) and Beijing, China (in 1995¹). The deliberations at these conferences include how to provide gender equity in areas of development, among other issues as evidences abound that several negative gender relations such as gender-based divisions of labour, disparities between males and females access to power and resources, gender biases in rights and entitlements, remain pervasive in Nigeria (National Gender Policy, 2006).

Over the past decades, the widespread 'unequal' power relations between men and women has continued to generate discussions and has turned out to be a crucial scholarly debate in developmental and academic discourses. One of the major foci of the 1975 UN Nigeria Assembly Conference was a critical examination of the problems and challenges that impede active participation of women in education, socio-political and economic development. Intellectuals and policy makers brainstormed on the problems militating against active participation of women in the global development agenda. Recently, the Millennium declaration overtly recognises the equal rights and opportunities for men and women.

Women are often excluded from participating in most sensitive social activities on the grounds of cultural and patriarchal dichotomies. However, the indisputable truth is that women are part and parcel of every society and its order (Olujimi, 2009). In Nigeria, like in many other African countries, gender relations are always patriarchal in nature (Abdullahi, Adekeye and Shehu, 2011). The men dominate the academic climate in the tertiary institutions and this well reflected in academic employment in the tertiary institutions. Also in most parts of the world today, women are struggling to assert a spirit of independence and a feeling of self worth. The struggle is precipitated by the wrong projection of women in patriarchal societies. Women are often projected as those who lack initiative and needed to be guided; motivated and monitored in whatever they do (Olujimi 2009). This notion arose from the fact that the African society has some sex role assumptions for both male and female. In fact, there is hardly any society where men and women occupy equal social status even in the most liberal societies like the United States. This is because it is believed each gender has specific roles to perform and there are varying ways of awarding merit to these roles (Oyekanmi, 2005). Over the years, the prevailing tendency has been to assume that the men are superior while the women are inferior, subordinate and weak.

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes provision for equality of women, guarantees the rights and protects the interest of women considering the religious, traditional and cultural norms that govern the society. Initiatives such as the establishment of the federal Ministry of Women Affairs in 1995, the Better Life For Rural Women Programme, the Family Support Programme (FSP), and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) were aimed at strengthening women's role society development goals. Unfortunately, this form of approach to women development has been faulted for it fails to inculcate and achieve the actual development needs of women. Instead of achieving gender

¹ These conferences cited defined global engagements with gender issues and women political-economic participation. Recent conferences have however been organized by the United Nations as the organization continues to be interested in gender and women issues especially in the developing nations.



equity, most development programmes using this approach have further deepened the crisis and even increased women subordination (see Ashfer,1991; Charlton,1984; Abdullahi, Adekeye and Shehu, 2011). Many of these programmes and initiatives ended up as windows of corruption for politicians and failed to address the emancipation of the women folk. The situation of women is worsened in the rural areas where negative attitudes and beliefs about women participation in the socio-economic development of the society are culturally entrenched. Consequently, there is the urgent need to critically examine gender divisions with a view to understand the root of the problem and promote gender equity that could facilitate social integration and sustainable development in Nigeria. The focus of this article is to examine the gender dimensions of imbalances in the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. This is to continue the needed interrogation of the trajectories to demonstrate the continuing, or otherwise, prevalence of the problematic even in the educational system at that level. Secondary data were gathered and this was completed with observation of the academy.

Brief History of Gender Discrimination in Employment

In the past, there were concerted and determined efforts to deprive the women of employment opportunities. From 1841 until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, a combination of pressure from male workers and philanthropic reformers restricted female employment in industry. Women were seen by the male factory workers as threat to their employment. As early as 1841, committee of male factory workers called for the 'gradual withdrawal of all female labour in the factory'.

According to Hacker (1972), with the employment of women as wage earners, men were quick to perceive them as a rival group and make use of economic, legal and ideological weapons to eliminate or reduce their competition. They excluded women from the trade unions, made contracts with employers to prevent them from hiring women, passed laws restricting the employment of married women, caricatured the working woman, and carried on ceaseless propaganda to return women to the home and jeep them there. This justifies the Victorian ideology that a woman's place is in the home. Thus, a combination of factors, which included ideology, the banning of child labour, and restrictions on the employment of women, locked the majority of married women into the mother-housewife role

However, Oakley (1981), states that from 1914 to 1950, there was a tendency towards the growing employment of women coupled with the retention of housewifery as the primary role expected of all women. During these years, women received many legal and political rights, for example, the vote in 1928, but these had little effect on the central fact of their lives: the mother-housewife role. In the twentieth century British society, the role of housewife-mother became institutionalized as 'the primary role for all women'.

Gender Inequality and The Academy in Nigeria

Gender inequality saturates all aspects of Nigerian life. They manifest in the family institutions, educational sector, labour market, politics and social service institutions. Indeed, discrimination against women in Nigeria is manifested within and outside the home. Statistics attest to the gross imbalance in the number of women employed as academics compared to the men in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The role of women as nation builders and education cannot be underestimated. Education reinforces generally all human potential and it is a very critical factor in human life. Education is believed to be the most powerful and dynamic instrument for social, economic, political, scientific and technological development of nations. (Aghenta, 2001). The World Bank experts observed that a country with more educated girls and women will not only heal her economy but will make it wealthier (UNESCO, 1985). Women have been seen to be astute managers of the home and local economies and so are capable of playing important management roles in Universities globally.

It is not possible to ignore women employment even though the employment pattern in Africa still favours men more than women in the academia. (Mensah, Biney and Ashang, 2009). Sutherland (2008) submitted that women face serious challenges in gaining access to their daily resources and bargaining power. These adversely affect the women, hence they are considered in the world as the most vulnerable to socio-economic depression. All these have culminated into huge gender gaps in literacy, education, health and access to power, despite all these women are still important and they constitute a visible force in terms of development and socio-economic changes of any society. Academic profession, like any other profession at the beginning of time was a single sex profession. (Egunjobi, 2008; cited by Abdullahi, Adekeye and Shehu, 2011). In the educational sector, inequality between men and women is obvious. Discrimination in education is a common practice in many parts of Nigeria and more rampant in the northern parts. Many of those who attempt to go to school are usually given out for marriage sometimes before the end of their primary education, while their male counterparts may continue to attain higher levels of education. This attitude towards women education is most inimical to the development of the families and the basic social structure in the society. The result of this lopsidedness in education between men and women is that few women become empowered and participate in the labour force, especially in teaching. In 1990, a simple head count showed that there were about 27 female professors in the country compared to 1,500 male professors representing only 1.8 percent of professors in Nigeria (Akande, 1996; Abdullahi, Adekeye and Shehu, 2011). A study of the recruitment, promotion and appointment² of women to academic and administration positions in Nigerian Universities reveals that although there has been an increase in the number of female academic staff recruited into Nigerian Universities in the recent time, the female percentage of total academic staff is still very low. The trend has continued to be the same even in the 21st century. The table below illustrates the gender disparity in the academic staff profile in selected Nigerian Universities.

Table 1: Academic Staff Profile in Selected Universities Showing Disparity in Gender (2007/2008)

INSTITUTION	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
UNN	1,017 (73%)	367 (27%)	1,387
FUTO	452 (83%)	93 (17%)	545
ESUT	210 (66%)	110 (34%)	320
IMSU	314 (87%)	47 (13%)	361
IBADAN	1,091 (82%)	243 (18%)	1,334
CALABAR	460 (82%)	102 (18%)	562
PORT HARCOURT	416 (88%)	57 (12%)	473

Source: Nwajiuba, 2011³.

² It must however be noted that promotion is heavily moderated by many other extra-gender factors in the Nigerian universities (please see, Omobowale, A.O., Akanle, O., Adeniran, A.I. and Adegboyega, K. 2013. Peripheral Scholarship and Context of Foreign Paid Publishing in Nigeria. *Current Sociology*. DOI:10.1177/oo11392113508127. Online 17 December, 2013.

³ The primary source of the data is Personnel Department/Units of the Universities 2007/2008

Table 1 reveals that in the selected Universities under consideration, the proportion of female lecturers to male lecturers is abysmally low. The female gender continues to occupy the back bench in the academia.

Table 2: Gender Pattern of Academic Staff by Designation at the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti

DESIGNATION	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL
Chief Lecturer	47	90.3	05	9.7	52
Principal Lecturer	38	86.3	06	13.7	44
Senior Lecturer	48	92.3	04	7.7	52
Lecturer I	53	85.4	09	14.6	62
Lecturer II	51	83.6	10	16.4	61
Lecturer III	43	86.0	07	14.0	50
TOTAL	280	87.2%	41	12.8%	321

Source: Adegun, 2012⁴

Table 2 shows that 87% of the Lecturers are male, while 12.8% are female.

Table 3: Gender Pattern of Academic Staff by Designation in the College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti

DESIGNATION	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL
Chief Lecturer	31	73.1	07	26.9	38
Principal Lecturer	17	80.9	04	19.1	21
Senior Lecturer	36	75.0	12	25.0	48
Lecturer I	15	53.6	14	46.4	29
Lecturer II	34	73.9	12	26.1	46
Assistant Lecturer	45	71.4	18	28.6	63
Graduate Assistant	3	100	00	0.0	03
TOTAL	181	64.9%	67	35.1%	248

Source: Adegun, 2012⁵

Table 3 reveals that 64.9% of the Lecturers are male while 35.1% are female.

Forces and drivers of the Nigerian Academia Gendered Imbalance

The orchestrated⁶ marginalization of women in the Academia as demonstrated above in the Tables as well as other endeavours of the society is traceable to the patriarchal nature of the

⁴ The data primary source is Establishment office, Federal Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti

⁵ Establishment Office, College of Education Ikere-Ekiti

⁶ *Orchestrated* because factors leading to this imbalance are social and legitimized by the norms and values of the society which have remained largely immutable. Social actions today reinforce gender imbalance to the extent that it has percolated the structures of the society. Just as the case in poor women political participation, women participation in the academy has remained largely poor. The higher women actually go in the system, the more difficult it becomes to achieve promotion due to other socially sanctioned responsibilities of women yet the societies have legitimized this.



Nigerian society. Generally, in Africa and particularly in Nigeria, many factors are responsible for the social/gender imbalance observable across social institutions. These factors include; familial responsibility, political forces, cultural forces, religious dictates and parental/intergenerational education, expectation and values. These factors have been variously allude to by Fatile, Akhakpe, Igbokwe-Ibeto and Oteh, 2012, Gadant, 2004, Lewu, 2005, Izugbara and Onuoha, 2003.

Predominant of these militating factors against women are the *Cultural and Societal Factors*. Customary Practices across Nigeria generally hold that the man is the head of the house and has the absolute control in the decision making process of the home. That is, a patriarchal society reinforces a norm that views men as leaders and women as followers (Belknap & Porter, 2006) Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women's lives. Women are in the subordinate position and male children are preferred over the female (World Bank 2005: 6). The practice of bride price has led to the idea of ownership of the woman, the exchange of bride price being evidence of a commercial transaction. The bride price is understood by many to symbolize the sale of the girl and ownership by her husband and family (Eze-Anaba, 2006). This has contributed in no small measure to the repression of the aspirations of women, as permission would have to be taken from her 'owner' before she embarks on pursuing any endeavour in life, academics inclusive. It is on record that many husbands have stopped their wives (properties) from working or seeking employment.

Political Factors are also strongly implicated. In Nigeria, there is no political will to implement International instruments that protect women rights. Since females are not adequately represented in Nigerian politics, gender-sensitive laws and policies are not a priority either at the state or national level (Oladeji, 2009). As a result, there has been no attempt in the direction of looking into the minimum percentage of lecturers reserved for women in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. 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. A few religions 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 most hold that the woman is the weaker vessel and plays the second fiddle in marriage partnership. As such, the woman is taught to be subservient to the man. The direction of life choices for the woman is directed by the man. This line of thinking has subjected women to varying degrees of difficulty in making career choices in life. *Illiteracy among Parents* is another major factor. Some parents in the rural areas, and even in the urban to some extent, still have not realized the importance of education for girls. The still believe that it is a waste of resources since the girl will be married into another family (Nwajiuba, 2011). Consequently, if parents refuse to give girls equal educational opportunities like the boys, it will surely come to bear on the gender imbalance in employment.

Conclusion:

This article has established that the gross gender imbalance in the employment of lecturers in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria will continue to generate debates until it is adequately addressed. As seen in the data above, the wide margin in the proportion of men to women in the academia is an issue for serious concern. In the pursuance of nation building and development, which the tertiary institutions typify, women should be accorded a much better role than they are allowed to play at the moment. More women should be engaged into the academics. Stereotype that views women as 'properties' of the men must be jettisoned and then a level playing field should be allowed for all irrespective of the gender. Interventions in the form of making laws that would prescribe the minimum percentage of women in academic should be vigorously pursued. Unfortunately, the problem is a more deep seated



one and is only manifesting in the academy. The problem started from the family from when higher values are attached to the male child and accorded some prestige.

Choice of courses also plays some significant roles. Many girl children do not study to higher levels before they are married while those that delay marriage for higher education are found and mainstreamed into some more established gender role play compliant disciplines. It is not uncommon to find departments of higher institutions with negligible proportion of women whether as students or lecturers. Cases also abound about women who become stagnated once they enter lecturing due to traditional family role play and other traditionally accorded roles which they find difficult to combine with the academy. The problem is thus more fundamental social structural. There is actually little the academy can do since it is just a clearing house for the already established and institutionalized gendered relations in the society. It is however only important for the academy and government policies on gender and education to pay closer attention to how even early life gender segmentation and value attachments play out at higher levels academy in later life and tackle it head on.

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