



PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE FOR NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

The issue of promoting gender equity in higher education is a fundamental issue in every society and Nigerian universities inclusive. Therefore gender equity needs to be revisited and consider in the current educational program of the nation and not to be neglected. therefore, this paper aims at providing an enabling environment for promoting gender equity in higher education in Nigeria, the need for gender equity and its benefit to

INTRODUCTION

Gender equity is an essential aspect of human rights, social justice, and sustainable development worldwide¹. In the context of Nigeria's higher education institutions, this pursuit of equality takes on particular significance. Gender disparities persist in access to education, representation in academic leadership, and the overall academic experience. Therefore, addressing these disparities is not just a moral obligation but also a crucial step towards enhancing the quality and inclusivity of higher education in Nigeria. Despite progress made in recent years, Nigeria continues to grapple with gender-based disparities within its educational system. In 2018, female enrollment in higher education institutions lagged behind that of males, with only 40.7% of females pursuing tertiary education². Moreover, gender disparities extend into the academic workforce, where women remain underrepresented in leadership positions and are often subjected to discrimination and bias

The study aims to highlight the significance of promoting gender equity in Nigeria's higher institutions by shedding light on the current state of affairs and emphasizing the transformative potential of an inclusive and equitable educational system. By addressing these issues, we can not



the Nigerian universities, findings on intervention programs to enhance gender equity in Nigerian universities and measures to close the gender gap in higher education. This paper identified some of the major problems of promoting gender equity in Nigerian universities which include, Cultural and Traditional Norms, Lack of Access to Quality Education, Gender-Based Violence, Institutional Bias, Lack of Mentorship and Role Models, Limited Awareness and Advocacy, Economic Disparities. Nevertheless, This paper also identified some of the benefits to include Enhanced Learning Environment, Improved Academic Performance, Increased Access to Higher Education, Empowerment of Women, Promotion of Equality, Increased Research and Innovation, Role Modeling and Mentorship, Global Competitiveness and many more promoting gender equity in Nigerian universities. Hence conclusions were made based on the findings while recommendations were also not left behind.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Higher Education, Nigerian Universities

only empower women and girls but also foster an environment that promotes diversity, innovation, and excellence in higher education.

Overview of Gender Equity

Two guiding principles are at the core of gender equity: fairness and impartiality. Fairness has to do with just treatment without favoritism or prejudice, while impartiality is defined as treating all parties equally. Equity, in its simplest terms, means meeting communities where they are and allocating resources and opportunities as needed to create equal outcomes for all community members³.

Gender equity, defined by United Nation⁴, is the “provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women, men and all genders.” Gender equity is important because, historically, societies around the world have deemed females, transgender people, and non-binary people as “weaker” as or less important than males.

In the world today, gender equity has helped shape and changes the roles and expectations of men, women and all genders at work, home and in society. The world would have been a better place when all people are accepted for their talents, skills, and abilities, regardless of gender.

Gender equity means respecting all people without discrimination, regardless of their gender. It also means addressing gender inequalities that limit a person’s ability to access



opportunities to achieve better health, education and economic opportunity based on their gender⁵.

Gender equity is a concept that encompasses the fair treatment and representation of individuals of all genders, ensuring that opportunities and resources are distributed without discrimination based on gender. Roger⁶ concedes that, gender equity involves creating conditions that allow both men and women to have the same opportunities for realizing their full human rights and potential.

Gender equity, also known as sexual equality or equality of the sexes, is 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 behaviors, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender. Gender equality is the goal, while gender neutrality and gender equity are practices and ways of thinking that help in achieving the goal. Gender parity, which is used to measure gender balance in a given situation, can aid in achieving gender equality but is not the goal in and of it. Gender equality is more than just equal representation; it is strongly tied to women's rights, and often requires policy changes. As of 2017, the global movement for gender equality has not incorporated the proposition of genders besides women and men, or gender identities outside of the gender binary⁷.

Similarly, UNESCO⁸ says gender equity "means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike." On a global scale, achieving gender equality also requires eliminating harmful practices against women and girls, including sex trafficking, femicide, wartime sexual violence, gender wage gap, and other oppression tactics.

Contributing to the above discussion, Ezeani⁹ stated that, "despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They have less access to property ownership, credit, training and employment. This partly stems from the archaic stereotypes of women being labelled as child-bearers and home makers, rather than the bread winners of the family. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence." As of 2017, gender equality is the fifth of seventeen sustainable development goals (SDG 5) of the United Nations. Gender inequality is measured annually by the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Reports.

Higher Education

Higher education, often regarded as the pinnacle of academic pursuit, represents a transformative phase in the educational journey of individuals. Far beyond the realms of elementary and secondary schooling, higher education encompasses specialized and advanced learning, nurturing intellect, critical thinking, and personal growth. Through a



diverse array of disciplines and fields, higher education serves as a gateway to knowledge, expertise, and innovation, empowering students to become specialists in their chosen areas. Examining the concept of Higher Education, Bemett¹⁰ noted that as an integral part of societal progress, it fosters a culture of research and intellectual curiosity, shaping well-rounded individuals poised to make meaningful contributions to their communities and the world at large. At its core, higher education embodies the pursuit of excellence and self-discovery, preparing learners for the challenges of the future while enriching their lives with the transformative power of education.

Higher education refers to the advanced level of education beyond the primary and secondary levels. It typically includes education provided by universities, colleges, professional schools, and other institutions that offer specialized academic and vocational programs. Higher education focuses on in-depth learning in specific fields of study, enabling individuals to develop expertise and advanced knowledge in their chosen areas¹¹. At the higher education level, students pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees, such as Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degrees, depending on their academic and career aspirations. The curriculum is more specialized and research-oriented compared to earlier stages of education, encouraging critical thinking, analytical skills, and independent research.

The Objectives of Higher Education

The objectives of higher education encompass a profound and multi-faceted purpose, elevating the pursuit of knowledge beyond mere academic instruction. At the heart of this noble endeavor lies the mission to equip learners with the tools to thrive not only in their chosen professions but also as responsible and compassionate members of society. Higher education stands as a bastion of academic excellence, fostering critical thinking, innovation, and research that push the boundaries of human knowledge. Beyond specialization and career preparation, it seeks to nurture holistic personal development, cultivating ethical values, leadership qualities, and a global perspective. By instilling a love for lifelong learning, higher education empowers individuals to adapt to evolving challenges, contribute meaningfully to their communities, and champion progress in a rapidly changing world.¹²

The objectives of higher education encompass a wide range of goals that aim to fulfill various roles in the personal, academic, and societal development of individuals. These objectives include:

1. **Academic Excellence:** One of the primary objectives of higher education is to provide rigorous and comprehensive academic programs that promote excellence in learning. Institutions strive to maintain high standards of education and ensure that students gain a deep understanding of their chosen disciplines.



2. **Specialization:** Higher education allows students to specialize in specific fields of study, enabling them to acquire advanced knowledge and expertise in their areas of interest. The specialization prepares individuals for specialized careers and positions in their respective industries.
3. **Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving:** Higher education fosters critical thinking skills, encouraging students to analyze and evaluate information critically. It cultivates problem-solving abilities that empower graduates to address complex challenges in their professional and personal lives.
4. **Research and Innovation:** Institutions of higher education are hubs of research and innovation. Encouraging students and faculty to engage in research contributes to advancing knowledge, technological breakthroughs, and developing solutions to real-world problems.
5. **Personal Development:** Higher education aims to nurture holistic personal growth in students. It focuses on character building, ethical values, leadership qualities, and a sense of social responsibility, preparing individuals to be responsible and compassionate citizens.

By pursuing these objectives, higher education institutions aim to empower individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to lead fulfilling lives, positively impact society, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge and human progress.

Factors Militating Against Gender Equity in Nigeria Higher Institutions

In line with the series of articles and publication on the need for promoting gender equity in Nigerian higher institutions, Ankomah¹³ noted that there are series of factors hindering the effectiveness of the policies (Global policy on Gender Equity) put to check the balance between both gender, these includes:

1. **Cultural and Traditional Norms:** Nigeria is a diverse country with numerous cultural and ethnic groups, each with its own traditions and norms. Many of these norms reinforce traditional gender roles, often placing women in subordinate positions. For example, the expectation that women should prioritize marriage and family over education can discourage them from pursuing higher learning.
2. **Lack of Access to Quality Education:** Access to quality education remains a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas. Poverty, lack of infrastructure, and early marriages can disproportionately affect female students, limiting their opportunities for higher education.
3. **Gender-Based Violence:** Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and assault, is a pervasive issue on some Nigerian campuses. Such incidents create an unsafe environment for female students and can deter them from pursuing their education.



4. **Institutional Bias:** Within higher institutions, gender bias can manifest in various forms. Women may encounter discrimination in hiring, promotion, and resource allocation. Unequal access to research funding and opportunities for career advancement can hinder their progress in academia.
5. **Inadequate Policies and Implementation:** While Nigeria has policies aimed at promoting gender equity in education, the effectiveness of these policies is often hampered by weak implementation and enforcement. A lack of clear strategies for gender mainstreaming within educational institutions can limit their impact.

In addressing these factors, it's essential to take a multi-dimensional approach that includes policy reforms, cultural sensitization, targeted support for female students and academics, and community engagement to shift societal attitudes towards gender equity in higher education.

Various Intervention Programs towards Gender Equity in Nigeria Universities

In a bid to promote gender equality in the Nigeria higher educational sector, series of programmes have been launched by the Federal Government, NGOs and Individuals to make available equal rights for all to get educated. This programs as posited by Ezeani&Nnamani¹⁴include:

1. **Gender Mainstreaming Policies:** Gender mainstreaming involves integrating gender considerations into all aspects of university operations, including curriculum development, admissions, faculty recruitment, and leadership positions. This approach is crucial for creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment
2. **Affirmative Action:** Affirmative action programs can provide targeted support to underrepresented groups, such as women, in higher education. These policies aim to increase female representation in leadership roles, faculty positions, and student enrollment, thereby addressing historical gender disparities
3. **Scholarship and Financial Support:** Universities can establish scholarships and financial aid programs specifically designed to assist female students. These initiatives help alleviate economic barriers that may prevent women from accessing and completing higher education.
4. **Gender-Sensitive Curriculum:** Developing gender-sensitive curricula involves creating educational materials and courses that challenge gender stereotypes and biases. By promoting critical thinking and gender awareness, universities contribute to a more inclusive learning environment
5. **Gender Sensitization Workshops:** Organizing gender sensitization workshops for students and faculty members can raise awareness about gender issues and



unconscious biases. These workshops create opportunities for open dialogue and promote a culture of gender equality

By implementing these intervention programs and strategies, Nigerian universities can take concrete steps to bridge gender equity gaps, fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students and academics.

Problems of Implementing Gender Equity in Nigerian Universities

The implementation of gender equity in Nigerian universities faces several significant challenges, reflecting broader societal issues and structural obstacles. Here, Ezeani, N.S¹⁵ examine some of the major problems encountered in achieving gender equity in Higher Institutions in Nigeria.

1. **Cultural and Societal Norms:** Deep-rooted e.g, cultural and societal norms that reinforce traditional gender roles often hinder gender equity efforts. Expectations regarding women's primary roles as caregivers and homemakers can limit their participation in academia. This is because since the female role is to take care of the children at home, as some culture reiterated, some of them feel its optional going to school there by limit their numbers in academia.
2. **Resistance to Change:** Resistance to change within academic institutions can impede gender equity initiatives. Some faculty and administrators may resist policies aimed at promoting gender equity, viewing them as threats to established norms and practices. It is evidential that in some faculties a female counterpart have never for once succeeded as a dean of the faculty for over thirty years and of a sudden a policy wan to come in and destabilize the existing one which will therefore cause resistance.
3. **Inadequate Funding:** Many Nigerian universities grapple with inadequate funding, which affects their capacity to implement gender equity programs effectively. Limited resources can hinder efforts to establish scholarships, mentorship programs, and infrastructure improvements.
4. **Lack of Awareness:** A lack of awareness and understanding of gender equity issues among university stakeholders, including faculty and students, can hinder progress. Without a shared awareness of the importance of gender equity, implementation efforts may stall. The staff and students of the universities need to be aware about gender equity through campaign so as to balance the gap between both sexes.
5. **Institutionalized Discrimination:** Institutionalized discrimination and bias within universities persist, affecting hiring practices, promotion decisions, and resource allocation. Discriminatory practices can further marginalize female academics.



Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from universities, policymakers, civil society organizations, and the broader society to dismantle gender biases and create a more inclusive and equitable educational system in Nigeria.

Benefits of Promoting Gender Equity In Nigeria Universities

Gender Equity is an issue that is widely acceptable. In view of this Hurtado et al.¹⁶, states that promoting gender equity in Nigerian universities can bring about numerous benefits, not only for women but also for the institutions and society as a whole. Here, we examine some of the key benefits.

1. **Enhanced Learning Environment:** Gender equity fosters an inclusive and diverse learning environment. Exposure to diverse perspectives enriches classroom discussions and promotes critical thinking. Research on (Understanding classroom strategies) has shown that diverse classrooms lead to better academic outcomes
2. **Improved Academic Performance:** Gender-equitable classrooms contribute to better academic performance for both male and female students. In a classroom where by both gender are allowed to participate on class activities together tends to bring about improvement in their academics because both gender will share their wealth of experience together there by making their performance to increase sporadically and I'm not saying that it only happens only where male and female are together alone, but im specific because of the topic in question. Reduced gender biases can lead to higher student engagement and success, benefitting all.
3. **Increased Access to Higher Education:** Gender equity initiatives can remove barriers that disproportionately affect women, such as economic constraints and cultural norms. If economic constraint, cultural norms which stand as the barrier to achieving gender equity can be remove, this w ill leads to higher female enrollment rates in universities, expanding access to education.
4. **Empowerment of Women:** Gender equity empowers women by providing them with equal opportunities to pursue higher education and academic careers. Empowered women are more likely to contribute actively to economic and societal development. This can be done by facilitating women's work as investment in public and private sector and also increase women's economic and social welfare as they venture out into formal work.
5. **Promotion of Equality:** Gender equity in universities aligns with principles of social justice and human rights. It reflects a commitment to treating all individuals fairly and without discrimination, reinforcing societal values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pursuit of gender equity in Nigeria's education system is an imperative task that demands collective commitment and concerted action. The multifaceted



challenges facing the achievement of gender equity necessitate a comprehensive and tailored approach, blending policy interventions, community engagement, and institutional reforms. As educational administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders, our responsibility extends beyond rhetoric to the implementation of concrete measures that foster inclusivity and equal opportunities for all.

The programs and interventions outlined, from scholarship initiatives and teacher training to community engagement and STEM promotion, underscore the need for a holistic strategy. True gender equity requires dismantling societal norms, challenging stereotypes, and creating an educational landscape that embraces diversity and empowers every student, irrespective of gender.

It is essential to recognize that promoting gender equity in education is not just a moral imperative but a strategic investment in the nation's future. By unlocking the full potential of both male and female students, we pave the way for a society that is not only more just but also more innovative, resilient, and prosperous.

The researchers move further to assert that commitment to monitoring, evaluating, and refining our interventions remains critical. Regular assessments will help identify areas of success, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Moreover, ongoing collaboration with communities, parents, and advocacy groups will ensure that initiatives are culturally sensitive and contextually relevant.

In fostering gender equity in Nigerian education, the visions are not just transforming schools; but are reshaping the narrative of the nation. Through these efforts, its envision a future where every student, regardless of gender, has the freedom to dream, learn, and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of Nigeria and the global community. The journey towards gender equity is a shared responsibility, and as the endeavor continue, we sow the seeds for a more equitable, just, and inclusive educational landscape in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Recommendations for promoting gender equity in Nigeria's education system:

1. **Policy Reform and Enforcement:** Advocate for and implement policies that specifically address gender disparities in education. Ensure enforcement and regular review of these policies to reflect evolving societal needs.
2. **Investment in Girls' Education:** Allocate resources to initiatives that specifically target girls' education, such as scholarships, mentorship programs, and infrastructure improvements that facilitate safe and accessible learning environments.
3. **Teacher Training and Sensitization:** Implement mandatory teacher training programs focused on gender sensitivity. This should include strategies to



eliminate unconscious biases, challenge stereotypes, and create a supportive learning environment for all students.

4. **Community Engagement:** Establish ongoing community engagement programs to raise awareness about the benefits of gender equity in education. Involve parents, community leaders, and local influencers in these initiatives to ensure broader acceptance and support.
5. **Empowerment Programs:** Develop and expand empowerment programs for girls, including life skills, leadership training, and entrepreneurship education. These programs should equip girls with the tools needed for success beyond the classroom.
6. **Digital Inclusion Initiatives:** Bridge the digital gender gap by providing girls with access to digital resources, training, and technology infrastructure. This ensures that they are well-prepared for the demands of a technology-driven world.
7. **Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track the progress of gender equity initiatives. Regular assessments will help identify successful strategies and areas requiring improvement.

These recommendations collectively aim to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment in Nigerian universities, benefiting both women and men.

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