

# **GENDER IMBALANCE IN THE ACADEMIA IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

The fact that there is gender imbalance at work and in social institutions continues to generate debates, discussions and concerns. Women have somewhat experienced gender opportunity restrictions and ceiling across societies down the ages. What is problematic is the consistency and persistence of the imbalance in Nigeria even when change is constant and reverberating around the globe. A survey of selected tertiary institutions in Nigeria revealed that there is gender imbalance in the constitution of the faculty staff. The men clearly outnumber the women. The paper proffers that for rapid societal development and greater sense of belonging, the discrimination against women should stop, especially in the academia who uphold the citadel of learning and that gender sensitivity in appointments should be put at the front burner.

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**Keywords:** Gender Imbalance, academia, gender sensitivity, restrictions

## **Introduction**

Gender discrimination refers to the practice of granting or denying rights or privileges to a person based on their gender. This kind of discrimination leads to unfair treatment directed to individual or a group on the basis of their gender which denies them their rights, opportunities or resources (Chauraya & Mugodzwa, 2012). In some societies gender discrimination is a long standing practice and it is acceptable to both genders. Gender discrimination is closely related to gender stereotypes and sexism which often is a barrier to developing harmonious working environment. This kind of discrimination manifests in the form of sexist language, sexual harassment or discrimination on the job (Maruzani, 2013).

Gender issue has been a focal point of discussion in many regional, national and international fora. Issues bordering on inequality and inequity are often addressed as well as all forms of discrimination against women. The 1999 Nigeria constitution makes provision for equality of women, guarantee the rights and protects the interest of women considering the religious, traditional and cultural norms that govern the society. 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 (Akanle and Olutayo, 2012, Akanle, 2011, Adebayo and Akanle, 2014).

Gender discrimination is in every society but problematization is common in Africa with its patriarchal system having absolute dangerous implications manifesting in institutions of higher learning. 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). 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 (Adebayo and Akanle, 2014).

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 1995). 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).

Furthermore, some of the conventions that Nigeria signed and ratified include ,The United Nations International Declaration of Human Rights (1948), The Convention on Economic , Social and Cultural Rights (1966) , The Convention On the Elimination of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), Beijing Declaration and Platform for United Nations. (1995), SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and its Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against United Nations (1997), the Millennium Development Goals (2000) and the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (2004) (Gberevbie et. al. 2014). All these were designed to help eradicate gender inequality in the society.

### **Gender Discrimination in Employment**

In the past, there were concerted and determined efforts to deprive the women of employment opportunities (Adebayo & Akanle, 2014). 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 keep 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’.

Women have to countenance wide-ranging predicaments related with gender biased discriminatory factors in organizations (Neathey, 2003; Sattar, Imtiaz, & Qasim, 2013). Women are frequently attributed to have less

aptitude as compared to men for various management and administrative positions. As a result of this women habitually acquire less job promotions and carrier advancement opportunities as compared to men due to various stereotypes narrated with job promotion of the female employees (Morrison, et al. 1990; Reskin and Ross, 1990). In the labour market, all the occupations must be obliged on the basis of skills of the organizational employees. Unfortunately, there was a superlative segregation among occupational opportunities on the basis of gender role where female employees acquire less occupational advantages as compared to their male colleagues (Mathipa and Tsoka, 2001). Women are frequently considered to be appropriate for household tasks such as child caring, nurturing and household management (Miller, et al. 1992).

It is not possible to ignore women employment even though the employment pattern in Africa still favours men more than women (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 (Adegun, 2012).

### **Gender Discrimination in the Academia in Nigeria**

Organizations are established basically to achieve the goals of profit maximization or provision of quality services to enhance the living standard of the people in any society. To achieve these goals, competent employees are required. In addition, availability of quality management in terms of skills, education and experience that abhors gender discrimination of any kind determines organizational effectiveness (Gberevbie, 2014).

Academic profession, like any other profession at the beginning of time was a single sex profession (Singh, 2002) cited by Egunjobi, (2009). But the World War II had actually opened the gateway to women emancipation in Europe and the USA before any University was introduced to Africa. Under the colonial imperialism, whatever operated in UK became law in Nigeria. Today in the Commonwealth nations, the situation of women in academics has improved. The percentage of women employed as full time academic staff ranges from the highest of 50% in Jamaica to the least of 9.5% in Ghana, with a Commonwealth average of 24%. The smallest percentages were found in Ghana 9.5%, Nigeria 13.6%, Tanzania 11.0%, Zambia 10.9% and Zimbabwe 9.8% all in Africa, for example, University of Ilorin, also showed female/male ratio of 11.6% to 88.4% (Egunjobi, 2009).

Like in many professions, discrimination against women in academics in the past existed throughout the world.

According to Egunjobi (2009), women academics in Nigeria were denied maternity leave under the University Law and in some cases they were not allowed to get married or have children. Some women were even refused employment despite the fact that they were qualified because it was felt that the women would be a distractive influence in the laboratory working in an all male career (Adegun, 2012).

Like any other sector, the ability of the Nigerian universities to achieve their goals and objectives is a function of its ability to attract competent workforce irrespective of whether they are males or females (Gberevbie, 2006). Workers in an organization, irrespective of their gender, are classified into management/senior employees and others. The management/senior employees are responsible for the overall administration of the organization for enhanced performance. These categories of employees provide the direction through effective leadership to achieve the overall goals of the organization; and this is where discrimination against women is mostly pronounced in Nigerian universities (Gberevbie, et. al. 2014). Nigeria, like other countries in Africa, has almost equal number of males and females that make up the total population. For instance, the last Nigeria's national population census that took place in 2006 showed that females were 68.3 million, which is about 48.78 percent and males constituted 71.7 million, which is 51.22 percent of the total population of about 140 million. In such a situation, it is out of place, therefore, to discriminate against women in the area of leadership in organizations, particularly in the Nigerian universities, if enhanced performance is to be achieved (Olomola, 2008; NPC, 2009; Gberevbie, et. al. 2014).

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

<b>INSTITUTION</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
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, 2011; Adebayo & Akanle, 2014.

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 Composition of academic staff in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

<b>FACULTIES</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Arts	47 (87.0%)	7 (13.0%)	54
Agriculture	34 (73.9%)	12 (26.1%)	46
Education	47 (65.3%)	25 (34.7%)	72
Engineering	42 (93.3%)	3 (6.7%)	45
Law	16 (76.2%)	5 (23.8%)	21
Management Science	21 (71.3%)	2 (8.7%)	23
College of Medicine	34 (91.9%)	3 (8.1%)	37
Social Science	51 (92.7%)	4 (7.3%)	55
Science	78 (78.8%)	21 (21.3)	99
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>366 (81.7%)</b>	<b>82 (18.3%)</b>	<b>448</b>

Source: Statistics and Planning office EKSU Nov. 2011; Adegun, 2012.

Table 2 above shows that eighty two (82) out of a total population of 448 in the University are female while 366 are males.. This shows that 18.3% are females while 81.7% are males. It should be noted that only 3(8.1%) females are in the College of Medicine out of 37 Lecturers, even though the College has just taken off about two years ago unlike other faculties that have been in existence since establishment of the University in 1982. The faculty of Engineering has 6.7%, female Lecturers as against 93.3% males. In the Faculty of Management Science 8.7% are females and 81.3% males and Social Science has 7.3% Females and 92.7 Males. This has the least percentage in terms of female employment. Faculty of Education has 34.7% female and 65.3% male and Faculty of Agriculture has 26.1% females and 73.9% males. Others like faculties of Arts has 13.0% females, Faculty Law with 23.8% female and Faculty of Science with 21.3% females.

Table 3: Gender Pattern of Academic Staff by Designation at the Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti

<b>DESIGNATION</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
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
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>280 (87.2%)</b>	<b>41 (12.8%)</b>	<b>321</b>

Source: Adegun, 2012; Adebayo & Akanle, 2014

Table 2 shows that in total across all cadres, 87.2% of the Lecturers are male, while 12.8% are female in the Polytechnic.

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	03
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>181 (64.9%)</b>	<b>67 (35.1%)</b>	<b>248</b>

Source: Adegun, 2012; Adebayo & Akanle, 2014

Table 3 reveals that also across all cadres, 64.9% of the Lecturers are male while 35.1% are female.

## Discussion

The above statistics attest to the gross imbalance in the number of women employed as academics compared to the men in the tertiary institutions 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.

Gender discrimination is a phenomenon that has negative implications on development of organizations and people. In this study, gender discrimination could be seen as obstacles against the employment or appointment into leadership positions or authority of an individual based on sex. It is a deprivation of rights of the individual that could have contributed positively to the development of the organization and the society at large. These rights include political, marriage/family and employment (Olomola, 2008). The fact remains that prosperity of nations is a function of the effective utilization of their factors of production such as land, capital, technology and labour. Although some studies show that Nigerian women have appreciably participated in the formal sector, their impact is still low relative to their male counterparts (Adebowale, 2009).

In recognition of the ills of gender discrimination against women, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for non-discrimination and of equality between the sexes as basis for societal development (Gbadamosi, 2014). To further overcome the challenge of gender discrimination against women in the formal sector of employment, the Federal Government of Nigeria put in place strategies in its policy on women employment to include: sponsored training in the public and private sector institutions on gender sensitization programmes on the role of women in the development process in order to raise awareness of women in the

society; sensitization of the public through mass mobilization campaigns about the need for women to be in formal sector employment in order to break traditional attitudes and stereotypes about women's work; encouragement of women's active participation in labour relations; and the review of labour laws to include more and better protective measures for women workers (Adebowale, 2009).

However, the study shows that despite the effort of the Federal Government to put a stop to the menace of gender discrimination against women both in the public and private sectors of the economy, the ugly practice still persists. Sex discrimination and subordination against women by their male counterparts highly limits women's access to the acquisition of the forces of production as well as opportunities to high status and job positions, educational qualifications notwithstanding. Instead, they are largely employed in lower status jobs even in the Nigerian universities than their male counterparts in spite of their large population size and enhanced educational qualifications. Commenting on the origin and reality of gender discrimination against women in management, politics and social affairs, it was argued that although the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for non-discrimination and equality between the sexes, in reality the gap between the law and the practice is quite wide and seemingly parallel (Olomola, 2008).

Thus, women not only have heavier work burden and lower earnings than men, but were also constrained on upward mobility because of cultural, legal and labour market barriers. This situation has also translated into fewer women been in high status occupation and top management position, not only in tertiary institutions, but in all endeavours of work life (Nwagwu, 2009).

The under-representation of women reflects not only continued inequalities between men and women but missed opportunities for women to contribute to solving the most pressing problems facing human kind. In this sense, gender differentials constitute an important and an enduring aspect of labour market around the world (ILO, 2003). Although, this situation is improving, but women's present job status has not yet guaranteed the desired representation in the work-organisation where participation is characterised by their representation in the lower echelon or occupational managerial career. For instance in Nigeria, women make up about half of the country's population, they remain under-represented in the formal labour force (Aina, 2012).

### **Factors Responsible for Discrimination in the Academia**

Several factors have been adduced as militating against the active participation of women in the formal labour sector in Nigeria. Prominent



among these militating factors against women are the *Cultural and Societal Factors*. Discrimination against women in Nigeria is rooted in traditional beliefs and practices that regard the man as superior to his female counterpart (Gberevbie, et. al. 2014). Socialization of children into specific roles by parents and relations in conformity with prescribed gender stereotypes is a contributory factor in the marginalization of the female gender in the formal labour sector (Adebowale, 2009).

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). 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. 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 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 pattern of education has also contributed in no small measure to the subjugation of women. According to Lauer and Lauer (2002), the traditional roles assigned to women inhibit their commitment to higher education, which in turn diminishes their prospects in formal labour participation. Females are withdrawn from school into marriages. While the

male counterparts continue to pursue further education, the females are put under pressure to marry early because they are thought to require minimal education to become good wives.

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. They 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.

### **Recommendation and Conclusion**

This paper has established the existence of gross gender imbalance in the employment of lecturers in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is likely to 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. In order to realise this, the following recommendations should be considered:

Policies that will ensure equal gender representation should be formulated, adopted and enforced by government.

Parents should de-emphasize gender socialization that prevents female from acquiring scientific and technological skills.

Gender discriminations based on employers' perception of appropriate work roles for the sexes should be addressed by government.

The pressure of marriage that prevents females from going for further studies to qualify for academics should be addressed and discouraged by parents.

Parents should be encouraged to give equal opportunities to their children in educational pursuit irrespective of gender.

Socio-cultural stereotype that views women as 'properties' of the men should be jettisoned and 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.

Conclusively, this paper has traced the history of gender inequality in the academia. It has established the gross gender imbalance in the employment of lecturers in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. 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. More women should be engaged into the academics. The paper believes that the gender imbalance in the academia in Nigeria is not palatable for national integration and development. The adoption and implementation of recommended policy measures will go a long way in improving gender relation in the academia in the Nigerian society thereby enhancing the task of national development in the 21st century and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development.

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