Gendered Specialization in the Arts and Humanities in Nigerian University Outputs

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Abstract

Studies have revealed gender differences in aspirations, performance, career choices, and specialization. These differences are much so openly glaring in a developing nation like Nigeria. The new millennium has brought about varied technological innovations and changes such as the internet that has imparted cultures and perceptions across societies. More women are going into specialization and careers hitherto regarded as masculine fields, and are performing in outstanding ways This informed the need to explore what the trend is of gender dynamics in higher education in present day Nigeria. . This survey study aimed at checking the gender differences in university outputs in Nigerian. And it was revealing to note that for areas such as the Arts and Humanities which are areas more females have ventured into in recent times, the males still dominate the graduating list. And for Faculties such as Communication and Information Sciences, the gap gets wider. Nigeria has a higher female population but this has not translated into higher rate of higher education graduation ratio for them and since a nations manpower and its quality outputs determines its developmental rate, there is the urgent need to find measures to accelerate the quality as well as the numbers of the female folks in higher education.

Keywords: Outputs. Differences, Manpower, Behavioral flexibility, Self-esteem, Conflict dynamics

Introduction

There are important processes in the formulation of career concepts, optimums, and attainments. These processes are not only functions of mental and cognitive processes. Also inclusive are the socialization process and the hidden curriculum.

There are important psychological processes involved in socialization. Such processes turn many women into advocates of the home and family "destiny". Rogers in Mowaiye (2014) believed that women have been carefully trained for this and are

repeatedly told that it represents the best that life can offer. With such training, educational attainments and aspirations can be curtailed especially in fields and specializations perceived to be masculine or male domains. However, education liberates the mind and thus causes changes in the role expectations of people. Mowaiye Fagbemi (1995,1997) reported a low female participation in the science-based fields at the lower and higher education levels and the tendency of the females in the study to have a high level of fear of success syndrome. A further study (Mowaye Fagbemi, 2020) revealed a slight change in the level of female participation in higher education. A persistent study may pinpoint efforts needed to pull the female manpower to national participation.

Women are said to tend to primarily rely on good social relationships as the source of determining self-worth, while men may depend on accomplishments.   This influence desires, educational goals, and aspirations. Specific "task" and goal-directed actions are necessary to bring desire to fruition. Achievement results through a desire to do well on a particular task, through the willingness of a person to be persistent on such task no matter the complexity and difficulty level of the task, raises bars as to what can be obtainable. Conflict dynamics can inhibit this. (Mowaiye, 2018)

Furthermore women are believed generally, not to be oriented towards achievement or success outside the home. As much as possible, they avoid "achieving" or 'succeeding" because of the notion that it is "unfeminine" to do so. Research findings by O Leary, (1997) revealed that males are more achievement-oriented than females. By the adolescent period, girls are attuned to the negative consequences of academic and occupational attainment. And, therein, lies what has been termed fear of success. The tendency to avoid success is a tendency that inhibits achievement-directed behavior as a result of concerns about the negative consequences of success. Fear of success thus leads to performance inhibition. Horner (1976) believed women more than men are more likely to associate negative consequences with femininity. In light of this, a bright and intelligent young woman whose aspiration is to be an attorney may instead settle for a career as a legal secretary because of fear that success as an attorney may reduce her chances of being seen as a desirable woman and wife.

Horner went on to say:

Many achievement-oriented women, especially those high avoid success,
when faced with the conflict between their abilities and interest, compromise
by disguising their abilities and abdicating from competition in the outside
world. (p. 164)

Inhibitions limit goals, efforts and attainments. However, with global changes and more positive achievement orientation of women, finding out gender differences vis-à-vis areas of specialization among university graduates in Nigeria is desirous.

Literature Review

Gender inequality in higher education remains a focal point of research in the developing world because of varied cultural and structural dynamics within the social millieu. Thiugh significant advancement has been made over the past few decades, gender inequality in access, and outcomes in higher education persist globally and more so in the developing worlds. This situation is compounded by tue almost continual constant poverty level of some of these nations. And with education being the first to fall under the poverty sledge hammer for the school age ones in many homes. And for many who manage to enroll in schools, staying enrolled and achieving good grades may be a herculaneum. Some young ones may have to go into business such as selling, being a sales boy or girl and the like to auguement what parents and guardians are able to get to feed and pay school fees ,buy books and other school necessity.

Gender dynamics in educational outputs especially at the higher levels differ from country to country with evolving trends. In some fields and specialization, women may be excluded altogether or at best relegated to specific fields such as nursing, teaching, and the arts. In the 21st century, while significant strides have been made in many countries towards gender parity in university enrollment and graduation, disparities persist in certain regions and fields of study. According to UNESCO (2020), female enrollment in tertiary education globally has increased significantly, with women often outnumbering men in university attendance in many high-income countries. However, access to higher education remains uneven across different social classes, geographic regions, and educational systems. While in some low- and middle-income countries, cultural norms, economic barriers, and lack of infrastructure still hinder women's ability to access higher education. For example, in rural areas, traditional gender roles may limit women's educational opportunities, or women may face family pressure to prioritize domestic responsibilities over academic pursuits (Miller, 2018). Furthermore, gendered patterns of educational attainment may reflect broader socio-economic inequalities, with men from wealthier backgrounds still enjoying greater access to higher education.

Gender inequality in academic achievement and outputs is a complex issue, shaped by both structural factors and individual experiences. Research has shown that women, particularly in the humanities, social sciences, and health sciences, often outperform men in terms of grades, completion rates, and overall academic success. According to a study by Gorman & Gorman (2019), women tend to have higher graduation rates and academic performance in general, particularly in undergraduate education. However, these academic achievements do not always translate into professional success, with women often facing barriers in terms of career progression within academia and outside the academia.

Women are often said to face both explicit and implicit biases that affect their academic experiences and invariably the outputs. . Female students are said to report higher levels of discrimination and micro aggressions, which can undermine their confidence and persistence to excel (Smith & Howell, 2020). Furthermore, societal expectations surrounding femininity and career roles discourage women from pursuing fields that are perceived as male-dominated, thus limiting their career trajectories and earning potentials (Wilkins, 2017).

One of the most persistent forms of gender inequality in higher education is the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon, where women, despite equal or higher levels of academic success, are less likely to advance into senior academic and administrative positions. A key driver of this disparity is said to be what can be said to be obtainables birthing the "glass ceiling," a metaphor for the invisible barriers that limit women's advancement in higher education and academia (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012). Women are often under represented in positions of power, such as deanships, professorships, and university leadership roles even within the academia. Research by Acker (2017) highlights that gendered organizational structures, leadership styles, and systemic biases in hiring and promotion processes contribute to the gender gap in higher education leadership.

Women in academia report feeling marginalized in male-dominated spaces and face microaggressions from colleagues and students. In addition, the pressure to publish extensively and secure research funding disproportionately affects women, who often experience greater family obligations (Perkins, 2016).

The academic experience for students can also be shaped by gendered dynamics in classroom interactions, mentorship relationships, and campus environments. Gender stereotypes can influence how students are treated by professors and peers, with female students sometimes encountering biases in how their ideas are received or evaluated. For example, female students may be less likely to be called upon in class, or their contributions may be undervalued compared to those of male students (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Gender-based violence and harassment also remain pervasive issues in many higher education institutions. Campus sexual harassment is a widespread problem, disproportionately affecting women, with long-term consequences for their mental health, academic performance, and career prospects. A 2020 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that nearly 30% of female students reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment while attending college, and incidents of sexual assault continue to be under reported due to fear of retaliation or disbelief (Krebs , 2016). The failure of institutions to adequately address harassment creates an unsafe and inequitable learning environment, leading to both academic and personal harm for students.

In response to persistent gender inequalities, many higher education institutions have implemented policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality. These include affirmative action initiatives, gender sensitivity training for staff and faculties, and the creation of women's leadership programs. Institutions like Harvard University,, and others have introduced initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion by increasing the representation of women, particularly in STEM fields, and by supporting female faculty through mentorship and career development programs (Ryu & McCauley, 2018).

Scholars like Morley (2013) argue that gender equality policies often fail to address the deep-rooted cultural and structural factors that contribute to gender disparities in higher education. Further, while many universities emphasize diversity and inclusion rhetoric, few institutions have fully embraced gender-sensitive curriculum reform, which would challenge entrenched biases in teaching and learning.

Gender inequality in higher education is a multifaceted issue that involves not only access to education but also experiences of gendered discrimination, academic achievement and career advancement. While women have made significant progress in terms of enrollment and academic performance, gender disparities persist in some program enrollment and graduation.

Statement of Problem

Population explosion in Nigeria continue to persisit and so is higher felame school enrollment. With more females attaining university degrees and going into careers hitherto said to be reserved for men, with many attaining leadership positions.

The present survey study aimed to see what changes there are among university graduates and the rate of graduating students and to further find out the proportion of turn over across some faculties and the gender disparity rate in the turn over using a federal university in central Nigeria as a case study.

Methods

A federal university in central Nigeria was purposively chosen because of its strategic location, as a middle state between the north and the south of Nigeria, and with a mixed population of ethnic groups all over the country. The federal university in the central region was purposively chosen as it attracts students from all over the country for its low fees. The University data was gathered for analysis purposes.

Results

Data analysis is presented in summary table form on table 1 .

Table I:

First Degree / Diploma Graduating list for 2021-2022 Academic Session

Faculty	Male	Female
Arts	594	405
Education	566	261
Social Sciences	768	361
Law	179	108
Communication And Information	284	106

Source: University data bank.

The total number of males across all faculties is 2,391, while the total number of females across all faculties is 1,241. And the gender distribution revealed that in every faculty listed, there are more males than females. And the gender disparity is particularly pronounced in faculties like Law, and communication and information sciences, where the number of males far exceeds the number of females. In the faculty of education, there were more than twice as many males (566) as females (261). In the faculty of Arts the ratio of males to females is relatively more balanced compared to other faculties, but there are still more males (594) than females (405).

The faculty of social sciences had the highest number of males (768) and a significant number of females (361), but the disparity is still notable and glaringly so. In the Communication and Information Science faculty, the number of males (284) is more than double that of females (106). And for the faculty of Law, there are more males (179) as compared to (108) females.

one notable trend was that across all faculties, the male population significantly exceeds the female population. The gender disparity is most pronounced in law and communication / information faculties, which had higher male graduands .And while faculties like Arts and Social Sciences though still male-dominated, had a somewhat more balanced gender distribution.

The above trend indicate a consistent trend of male dominance in the student populations across these faculties, with particularly stark disparities in fields traditionally seen as male-dominated, such as the faculties of law and communication / information.

As Table I revealed,the f aculty of Arts had a high number of females with an N of 405 and the males had an N of 594, which is quite high in ratio and in comparison to the males

The high number of graduating females in the Arts field is quite revealing. And it does show that societal perception is changing gradually and more females are entering the field

From the table, it could also be observed that the Law faculty and that of communication / information had the poorest number of female graduates of all the faculties, with a figure of 108 and 106 in number respectively .

The Faculty of Social Sciences has a total (N) of (768), in which (361) are females.
Social Sciences had almost half of its graduands being females (F: 361; M: 768). Communication and Information faculty also had substantial number of female graduates who constituted also almost half of the Faculty graduates (F: 106; M: 284), Law faculty had a little over half of its graduates being females (F: 108; M: 179).

Two faculties that had a dismal outing of female graduates as noted were the Faculties of law, (F: 108; M : 179) and communication and information (F: 106; M:/284). Faculty of communication and information could be said to be particularly pathetic in female ratio to the males. Faculties of Education and Art got close to having almost half of its graduates as females.

The faculty of Arts had higher number of females graduates compared to males across the faculties.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the 2021/2022 academic session, the gender career stereotype seems to have trended with the number of graduates and the gender didparity in varied faculties except for the Faculty of Art that had quite a high number of females. It was an interesting observation with the high number of females graduating in the faculty of Art. . One factor that could be responsible could be that the rigid societal gender fixation is breaking down. And that is what it seems at east with the high number of females graduands in a field like Arts because the notion it is reserved for males no longer seems to hold. . The impact of the 21st century social media use and the internet could be a factor for the change.

The improvement in number across faculties especially when the ratio is compared to males though cannot be said to be the same in the faculties of Law and Communication and Information. The ratio of females to males was low.

Communication and Information seems to be an area where females are yet to delve into compared to the other faculties where there were more female graduands. This is worth noting for stakeholders. The role of the Communication and Information area cannot be under-estimated in development. And it cannot be that more females cannot be found with flare for this course, which begs the question of why there are so few of them there. Efforts must be made to not leave out the female manpower in this

important sector. This is essential for national development and communication and information sector cannot be glossed over in the task of fast tracking development.

Conclusively, there are structural and cultural barriers that must be broken down to enable for higher female participation in higher education. And to make for greater female enrollment and for gender equality gap to close up.

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