

Academic Women's Perspective on Strategies for Inclusion of Women in Nigeria Higher Education Governance

Mboto, Odey. A (Ph.D), Dr. (Mrs) Pauline U. Ekpang, Prof Asuquo, P. N.
Department of Guidance & Counselling, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides data on women in academics' perspective on approaches for enhancing female participation in university's governance in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. Subjects were 254 women in academics with varying years of teaching experience, from two universities in Calabar. A questionnaire (Academic women perspective on strategies of increasing female participation in university governance questionnaire) was used to gather data from respondents in order to provide answer to the only research question of the study. Subjects were required to outline strategies they considered effective and practicable, for increasing female participation in university governance. Actual numbers, frequencies and percentages were used to present the result. Results indicated that eleven out of the fifteen strategies had a rating of above 70% with strategies listed in items 5,6 and 10 adjudged by the respondents as most effective for increasing women's capacities and abilities for active involvement in the management of higher education institutions. The study recommended among others that counsellors should focus the advocacy energy on promotion of gender equity by empowering and equipping academic women to take their rightful positions as managers in institutional governance of higher institutions.

Keywords: Women, Higher Education, Administration, Governance

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, women have comparatively remained an unused resource in the management of higher education institutions in Nigeria. They and their male counterparts constitute the essential human resource base upon which every nation's development process depends and from where leaders including managers of higher education are drawn. Managers of higher education institutions play a crucial role in the development of their institutions and nations. They generally mobilize the material and non material resources available to the institutions to control, coordinate, direct and guide subordinates and other colleagues toward achieving the corporate goals of their institutions. The context of higher education where some of them women work, leadership is provided to head committees, boards, panels, and governing councils as well as departments, faculties, directorates and the university at large. Also those in management positions represent the top echelon of decision-making cadre and are placed based on their experience and progression in the academy as effective scholars and not necessary as effective administrators. The progress made by women so far in terms of access though significant but not sufficient. Certain aspects of the access like participation in Universities governance require significant improvement, requiring the promotion of more enlightened attitudes towards highly educated women whose qualifications entitle them to career fulfillment and advancement to decision-making positions. In other words, as women continue to become more numerous management positions like Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Deans and Heads of department should be accessible to those with the right credentials to occupy irrespective of their gender. The conventional development approaches in Nigeria had however, remained male driven with a social, economic and masculine bias.

It is widely believed that education is an important tool for the achievement of social justice and socio-economic progress. For women as a social group, education gives them better chance to control their lives, to earn money, to be better mothers and to have improved relationship with spouses as well as reduced infant mortality and fertility rates, greater and higher economic production, improved family and child nutrition, better resource utilization, longer life expectancy for both men and women, are equally associated with girls education (Moss, 2007). Education also fosters empowerment which is essential for the participation of women in aspects of the development process while higher education provides the expertise that facilitates ascension to critical positions which shape policy in all fields of human endeavour. Little wonder that, United Nations (2003:75) warns that:

As long as women remain illiterate and are subject to discrimination in education and training, the motivation for change so badly needed to improve the quality of life for all will fail, for in most societies, it is the mother who is responsible for the training of her children during the formative years.

Undoubtedly, the promotion, acceptance and entrenchment of the principle as enunciated above in the field of higher education as well as providing adequate training opportunities for women to acquire such skills as would put them up for possible consideration when leadership positions arise would therefore afford them the opportunity to take meaningful part in the governance and development of higher education in Nigeria.

A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Traditionally, women have had limited role in society with restricted opportunities and the preference of males over females in education has been a marked feature throughout history (Esu,2008; UNESCO 2012). Their under-representation at various levels of leadership has become a recurrent theme in studies across the globe (Morley, 2019; Bagihole & White, 2011; Elg & Jonnergard, 2010). About two decades ago, the Association of Commonwealth Universities published data that looked like management of higher education was a single sex profession: 13.9% of Heads of administration in Commonwealth Universities were women and only 6.9% were executive Heads or Vice Chancellors. More recently, the American Council on Education (ACE) in an American College President Study 2017 showed that only 30% of the nation's college and university presidents were women – an increase of just 4% from 2011 statistics. Similarly, revelation from a report on the status of women in higher education indicated improved access for women in terms of earning college degrees and entry into mid-level positions in most economic sectors but made very little progress in advancing into chief executive positions everywhere including higher education.

In Nigeria, a few notable exceptions to this general trend in our recent history (as reported by Fajonyomi, Ogungbade, Kolawale, Isarinde & Bolu-Steve, 2017) are perhaps Professor Grace Awani Alele-Williams who was the first female to become the Vice Chancellor of an African University (University of Benin, 1985-1991). This was followed by Professor Jodesola Akande who became the first and only female Vice Chancellor of Lagos State University to date (1989 – 1993). A little later, Professor Aize Olohigbe Imoukhome Obanyan was appointed to head Covenant University between 2005 and 2012 and later Land Mark University. Be that as it may, far more men than women are represented in the leading positions in higher education management and gender equity seems very difficult to achieve. This, according to Bassey & Oshie (2018), is a problem of communication, where most of the male counterparts communicate and share ideas amongst themselves. The continued neglect of women graduates as part of the essential human resource base and keeping them away by unfair reasons of gender remains a flagrant wastage of their valuable expertise which should have been harnessed to the overall social development across all sectors including higher education (World Economic Forum, 2010).

This gender weighting of higher education landscape observed in the reports above and literature means that leadership of American Commonwealth nations (including Nigeria) universities is provided mainly by men.

It also means that the present of a critical mass of women at the decision-making levels of these institutions is grossly inadequate. The common understanding in this setting seems to be that management is a natural progression from effective and successful academic service delivery and curriculum administration. However, this theoretical underpinning of academic leadership does not seem to explain the differential between male and female occupying leadership and management positions in higher education which is still biased to the greater disfavor of females. It does appear then that the basis for the underrepresentation of women in higher education management is gender related with strong undertones of the historical roles of women in certain societies, societal attitudes to women which discourage their participation in decision-making, the conflicts arising from their advanced education and exposure to other cultures, their own continued commitment to the values of their own race, religion and nation (UNESCO, 1998).

Gender is a social and cultural construct and sex upon which it is based, is genetically determined. While genetic factors account for sex differences of males and females, cultural factors explain gender roles, which globally confer more power on men than on women. A 1993 study by UNESCO/Commonwealth Secretariat entitled "Women in higher education management" identified critical barriers hindering women participation in decision-making to include limited access to education, especially higher education, discriminatory appointment and promotion practices, the stress of dual family and professional roles, family attitudes, career interruptions, cultural stereotyping, alienation from the male culture and continued resistance to women in management positions, propagation of glass ceiling syndrome which privileges covert criteria for advancement, absence of adequate policies and legislation to ensure the participation of women. It was suggested that the real solution to remedy the exclusion of women was a reversal of these trends via wider access to higher education, review of appointment procedures, provision of legislative and infra-structural support in all professions and of special programmes for women, affirmative action to favour women's access and participation amongst others.

Given the complex environment of the 21st century and multifaceted challenges facing higher education in Nigeria today, reform of the subsector will require such leadership that has capacity competence and character to ensure radical transformation of its institutions. Already, a framework of qualities and skills set required by prospective leaders as generated by UNESCO/Commonwealth Secretariat provides an ideal checklist for that purpose. It is presented as follows:

- Strong record of academic leadership/excellence in research and teaching; Leadership skills including visioning capacities;
- Management skills;
- Institutional experience;
- International experience of higher education;
- Negotiating skills to deal with stakeholders (internally, the management, professoriate and students; externally, national policy makers, the economic sector, community groups, regional and international peer groups);
- Communication skills including, if possible charisma.

A cursory look at these basic parameters and unique skill requisites does not in any way suggest that they are male-centred. Against this background, there is no reason why women should be excluded from this leadership position and power, provided they possess the necessary competencies and capacities being sought.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the pressing educational concerns in Nigeria today is promotion of higher education and the under-representation of females in institutional management and governance. This is reinforced by the

recognition and enhancement of the university's role in society, the creation and exchange of knowledge, impact of globalization and internationalization of education and mainstreaming of women issues. The need for increasing female participation in the governance of higher education has become more crucial, especially now that the role of women in nation building can no longer be ignored; considering the high social and economic return of female education (Miroux, 2011). In contrast to extensive research focusing on the under-representation of females in access to higher education; and the delineation of factors associated with poor participation, there has been paucity of research on effective methods/approaches for increasing participation and enhanced achievement. Research is therefore, required to fill this gap in literature especially as it relates to increasing their participation and improving their capacities in management of higher education.

Additionally, available literature contains relatively few studies that focus on methods/approaches for increasing participation and on improving access to the top decision-making cadre. Most of the few existing studies are basically theoretically reviews of methods/approaches (Bassey, 1997; Ekpiken 1997 & Piwuna and Ncharam, 2001). Studies that provide self-reported empirical data by lecturers on methods/approaches for improving female participation in institutional governance are yet to be located from available literature. A pertinent question therefore is: what are the views of women academics on methods/approaches for increasing female participation and improving their achievement in university's governance? The present study is an attempt to provide empirical data on academic women perspectives on increasing female participation in university management in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study:

The prime objective of this study was to examine

- The perspective of women academics on strategies for increasing their participation in the governance and management of their institutions.

Research Question – The following question guided the study:

- What are the views of women academics on appropriate methods/approaches/ strategies for fostering active their participation in the governance and management of their universities?

METHODOLOGY

Due to the nature of the study which entailed use of simple frequencies, it was not necessary to formulate research hypothesis and the only research question of the study was designed to elicit responses of women academics on their perspective on strategies for increasing female participation in university governance and management.

Subjects: Subjects were 254 women academics from the 2 universities in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The school sample was stratified across the two institutions in the town. In terms of school specific location, the sample consists of 150 University of Calabar and 104 of Cross River State University academic women. Within each school selected for the study, participation in the study was opened to all women academic. Altogether, the sample comprised academic women with varied years of teaching experience (mean teaching experience = 10.2 years, standard deviation = 2.8). Their ages ranged from 30 to 58 years, with a mean age of 39 years and a standard deviation of 3.2. (Table 1 represents this information in a tabular form).

Table1: Number and characteristics of women academic used in the study

Subjects	250
Schools	2
Mean experience	10.2 years;
Standard Deviation	2.8
Mean age	39. years
Standard Deviation	3.2

Instrument and Data Collection: A questionnaire (Women academic’s perspective on strategies of increasing female participation in university governance questionnaire) was designed by the researchers to collect data for this study. The questionnaire had two parts. In the first part, subjects were asked to supply information on the following variables: age, educational qualification, and years of teaching experience. In the second part of the questionnaire, subjects were required to tick the methods/approaches they considered, would increase female participation in institutional governance. In each school visited for data collection, available academic women were called for a meeting with the research team, through the help of the heads of departments, sometimes with some assistance from the Dean’s office. Right there, the purpose of the study was explained and subjects willingly responded to the questionnaire and returned on the spot. The questionnaire used for data collection was validated by the authors with the help of experts in measurement and evaluation while the reliability estimate of .76 to .85 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha index. The data collection exercise lasted for 12 working days.

Method of Data Analysis: Frequency and percentages were used to present and describe the result. The frequency for each type or response was determined and further converted to percentage to show the relative proportion of subjects that choose a particular method/ approach. Based on this, a frequency distribution table was prepared for the data

RESULTS/FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 2: Women in Academics’ Perspective of Strategies for Increasing Female Participation in university’s management, ranked & rendered in percentage (%).

S/N	Strategy Description	Responses
1	Attitude orientation of female academics	125(50)15 th
2	Identifying all barriers to gender equity & discussing best practices	230 (92) 4 th
3	Provision of enforceable inclusion and diversity policy in universities	180 (72)
4	Confronting your institution’s gender diversity issue head on	135(54)13 th
5	Setting up strategic institution-wide objectives on gender	235 (94) 3 rd
6	Offering females formal mentoring & leadership development opportunities	240 (96) 1 st
7	Reviewing of discriminatory appointment and promotion procedures	180 (72) 9 th
8	Adoption of affirmative action to favour women participation	195 (78) 8 th
9	Ensuring genuine change in attitudes towards full genderequity	230 (92) 4 th
10	Formulating and implementingprogrammes that will enhance gender sensitivity, reflection and balancing	240 (96) 1st
11	Regular system-wide consultation with major stakeholders	225 (90) 6th

12	Consulting with community leaders on gender equity participation	150(60) 11 th
13	Adoption of gender equity participation road show project	145(58)14 th
14	Promoting wider female access to higher education& assertiveness training	225 (90) 6 th
15	Reduction of costs of female higher education	125(50)15 th

Table 2 shows women academics' views regarding methods/approaches for increasing female participation in university governance. Actual numbers and percentages for responses to each method/approach are shown in the table. The percentages are in parenthesis while the ranks are on the last column on the right side of the table. Table2 shows that generally, the women academic selected and utilized in this study, perceived all the 15 methods/ approaches as useful in increasing female participation in university governance. Specifically, a greater proportion of the subjects (above 50%), considered 13 out of the 15 methods/approaches as effective for increasing female participation in active involvement as managers in university management. Top on this list is item 6; "Offering females formal mentoring & leadership development" (96%) and items 10; "Formulating and implementing programmes that will enhance gender sensitivity, reflection and balancing" (96%) followed by item 5; "Setting up strategic institution-wide objectives on gender" (94%);item 2 Identifying all barriers to gender equity & discussing best practices (92%) and item 9; "Ensuring genuine change in attitudes towards full gender equity" (92%). Others are: item11 "Regular system-wide consultation with major stakeholders" (90%), and 14 "Promoting wider female access to higher education & assertiveness training" (90%); then item8; "Adoption of affirmative action to favour women participation" (78%);items3 "Provision of enforceable inclusion and diversity policy in universities" and 7 "Reviewing of discriminatory appointment and promotion procedures" (72%), in that order.

Table2 also shows that four items are less popular with the respondents as methods/approaches effective for increasing female participation in the management of universities. These are: item 1 "Attitude orientation of female academics" (50%) and 15, "Reduction of costs of female higher education" (50%);"Confronting your institution's gender diversity issue head on" (54%) "Adoption of gender equity participation road show project" (58%), "Consulting with community leaders on gender equity participation" (60%).The rating for these last four items was below 70%.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The only research question in the study was, "what is Women academics' perspective on strategies for promoting female participation in universities' governance?" The women in academics who participated in this study seem to be more favourably disposed to all the methods/approaches as effective in increasing participation of female universities' governance. However, eleven out of the fifteen strategies outlined in the study had a rating of above 70% and of this number, strategies listed in items 5,6 and 10 are adjudged by the respondents as the most effective for increasing women's capacities and abilities for active involvement in the management of higher education institutions

Increasing the number of female academics particularly in the management of their institution is important in that, their presence in decision-making cadre would encourage younger female colleagues to aspire to greater heights as well as assure female students who have tended YGD to experience 'oppression and victimization' some form of protection thereby decreasing dropout rates emanating from such tendencies. Besides, female managers in higher education would serve as role models to female students. The availability of viable and veritable strategies as revealed in this study designed to promote the equitable placement of female academics in such decision-making platforms that can enhance their viability, visibility and productivity is a positive development. The result as shown here is an empirical affirmation of the suggestion that the real solution to remedy in the exclusion of women from top decision making echelons of society was a reversal of schemes that undermined their aspirations along these directions (UNESCO/Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993& World Economic Forum, 2010).

Experience has shown that, offering females formal mentoring and leadership development and formulating and implementing programmes that enhance gender sensitivity, reflection and balancing promote rapid psychological, social and economic development of the female gender at all levels (UNESCO, 2010 UNICEF,2011). When such environment is created, they are always at an advantage. Providing such an enabling and positive environment for female education advancement would certainly augur well with the female folk and the entire society, since it would increase their access to education, positions and power(UNESCO, 2010). This could be achieved through practical mentoring and leadership training, introducing gender sensitivity and balancing policies, where and when practicable. Emerging literature on increasing female access to education, position and power revealed that, mentoring, leadership training and gender balancing schemes have strong effect on the education and advancement of the girl child (Miroux, 2011).

Setting up strategic institution-wide objectives on gender, identifying all barriers to gender equity and discussing best practices as well as ensuring genuine change in attitudes towards full gender equity among major stakeholders and community leaders on the need for females to be given the highest education and power opportunities possible, is important, because if they were fully aware of its importance, they would willingly support and encourage their participation more in institutional governance. The task of ensuring this among stakeholders and community leaders could be easily achieved through policy implementation circulars, seminars, posters, bill boards and mass education campaigns (utilizing) both the print and electronic media.

The importance of regular system-wide consultation with major stakeholders, promoting wider female access to higher education and assertiveness training, adoption of affirmative action to favour women participation, provision of enforceable inclusion and diversity policy in universities as well as reviewing of discriminatory appointment and promotion procedures individual development have long been recognized and emphasized by other related studies (Jaja, 2013, Bagihole & White, 2011 & Asuquo, 2017). This implies that these factors have to function effectively to ensure that a re-orientation of female academics and students attitude towards institutional governance; so as to help revalue themselves, reorder their lives and participate fully in school management activities with all their heart.

Table2 also shows that about half or a little above that number of the respondents in the study considered only 4 methods/approaches as being comparatively less effective for increasing female participation in higher education institutional governance. These are: attitude orientation of female academics, reduction of costs of female higher education, confronting your institution's gender diversity issue head on adoption of gender equity participation road show project consulting with community leaders on gender equity participation. It appears from this part of the result that the academic women who participated in this study tend to undermine the relevance of these afore mentioned methods/approaches in student motivation for involvement institutional governance. For instance, the road show project, which is the initiative of the common wealth secretariat in 1990 was meant to attract girls to take up studies and careers in science and technology-related fields with some astonishing results. The project moved from city to city, carrying the message to girls about opportunities for them in scientific and technical careers, using women who have opted for and succeeded in scientific or technical careers, as role models. In this project, girls are involved in practical activities, career guidance activity and games.

Attitude orientation of females in the academia is particularly important especially in places where some cultural practices, tend to isolate or put them down. In areas such as these, female participation management of their institutions will be very low if there are no deliberate orientation activities. In addition, the relevance of confronting the barriers to their advancement in their institution's gender diversity issues head on is obvious. The availability of these self-assertive actions would free girls and academic females from fear of male chauvinism and domination as well as other cultural biases against the womenfolk.

Counselling implications It is obvious that the female academics are under-represented in available opportunities in institutional governance at higher education level in Nigeria. This gender imbalance and inequality which is quite unfair is a matter of great concern to major stakeholders including counsellors. Counsellors are by orientation advocates for the individuals. The affirmation of the strategies presented to women academics for consideration in this study as potentially viable tools for addressing gender equity and balancing provide ready schemes for counselors to utilize for this purpose. The study has provided them with a variety of methods for the promotion of inclusion of the female gender in the institutional governance within the context of higher education in Nigeria. This study also has implications for research. Further research should focus on the potency of some of the highly subscribed method among female scholars managerial progression and advancement. Longitudinal studies are also required to find out the effectiveness of the methods/approaches identified in this study in female participation in other areas of leadership.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The result of this study illustrated the following significant characteristics of women in academics' perspective of effective methods/approaches for increasing participation of females in institutional governance of their universities. Some of the methods like offering females formal mentoring and leadership development and formulating and implementing programmes that enhance gender sensitivity, reflection and balancing are very popular among them. Others are regular system-wide consultation with major stakeholders, promoting wider female access to higher education and assertiveness training, adoption of affirmative action to favour women participation, provision of enforceable inclusion and diversity policy in universities as well as reviewing of discriminatory appointment and promotion procedures individual development. The result also revealed a few of the methods that were not as popular as the ones earlier presented in this paragraph. Based on the foregoing, it is recommended as follows:

- Counsellors should focus the advocacy energy on promotion of gender equity by empowering and equipping academic women to take their rightful positions as managers in the institutional governance of their universities.
- They should choose from a variety of strategies as suggested and affirmed by academic women for that purpose in this study.
- Female academics should be ready and willing to take up such position as may be available through diligent commitment and attitude change.
- Male academics should be willing to encourage equity participation of their female counterparts in the management of their institutions.

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