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GENDER EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF HIGHER INSTITUTIONS IN AKWA-IBOM STATE

Nkang I.E.

Abstract

The study investigated the influence of gender on sustainable development of higher education in Akwa Ibom State. Two null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study. The study population consisted of lecturers and students of Faculty of Education, University of Uyo and School of Education, Akwa Ibom State College of Education. Two sampling techniques were employed in drawing out a sample of 415 respondents, purposive for lecturers and stratified sampling for the students. Two separate instruments: Gender and commitment to teaching by lecturers; and Gender and research and publication by lecturers, and tested at 0.05 alpha level using the t-test. The analysis revealed a significant influence of gender on lecturers' commitment to teaching and research and publication. Women were more committed to teaching, while men involved more in research and publication. The null hypotheses were rejected. Consequently, it was recommended that Gender equity should be pursued meaningfully in the light of women ~ role in the development of education in particular and the nation generally; relevant, laws should be passed to enhance gender equity at both the state and federal levels; Women should be given greater chances to partake as lecturers and administrative staff in the universities; and that Special provisions should be made to encourage women involve more in research activities.

Introduction

According to Nwagbara (1998:34) gender is "a societal construct which represents the social relationship between men and women and in which women have been subordinated". The case of equality and equity between men and women in the third world countries still appears to be a far cry from what it should be. This is confirmed by Badjan-Young (1995) who posits that despite 10 years of Nairobi Forward Strategies and Beijing's Platform for Action, there are still deep seated attitudes and mindsets among men and women which are obstacles to the fulfillment of women's rights. The situation is neither different in Nigeria. Sustainable development is a function of vision, commitment and hard work. These variables seem to be lacking in many individuals as people seem to be more interested in what they can get from the system rather than their contributions towards the growth and development of the system. Studies on the role of women

in sustainable development reveal that women are more committed in whatever position they find themselves than their male counterparts (Adadevoh, 2001). Gender equity in education may be a step in the right direction towards addressing these issues, as education is the pivot upon which development of any nation evolves. Both sexes have the right to equity in education, in which discrimination is non-existent.

In the educational sector, female educationists (teachers, administrators and lecturers) have been observed to be more committed and sincere to their work than the males (Odejide, 2003). This suggests that given equal opportunities, women are likely to contribute more to the educational development of the nation than their male counterparts. This observation brings into focus the issue of gender equity and sustainable national development. Although Nigeria is a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against women and has established some projects for the implementation of the articles of the Convention, she has not enacted the domestic laws for the enforcement of the articles. Even though the 1999 Nigerian Constitution makes provision for equality of women, "the problem is with how far in practice the constitution guarantees rights, projects the interest of women having regard to the religious, traditional and cultural norms that govern (the) society" (Nasir, 2001). The CEDAW Committee for Reporting Obligations noted at their 1998 session that, in Nigeria, there is still a paucity of gender disaggregated statistics which would make comparison of women's progress in several sectors of national life easier (Manya, 2000). An examination of the various Nigerian University Acts, which govern the establishment of each university shows that, in general, they contain a clause prohibiting exclusion on account of "ethnic grouping, sex, place of birth or of family origin or religious or political persuasion from studentship, employment or membership of anybody establishment by the Act" (University of Uyo Draft Act, 2000, p. 18; University of Benin Amendment Act, 2000, p.18, University of Jos Draft Act, 2000 section 1:3 a). As part of this very partial implementation of CEDAW there are no reserved places for women with regard to admission to higher education or employment.

Gender equity has been and is still a major issue to individuals, governments, NGOs and international organizations. This led to the convening of *The Fourth World Conference on Women* from September 4 - 15, 1995 in Beijing, China, officially tagged "*The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace*" - The Conference provided a platform for Action that aimed at achieving greater equality and opportunity for women. It resulted in *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, which forms an agenda for women's empowerment worldwide.

The Declaration embodies the commitment of the international community to the advancement of women and to the implementation of the platform for Action,

ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels. The Platform for Action sets out measures for national and international action for the advancement of women. It is expected to enhance the social, social and political empowerment of women, improve their health and their access to relevant education and promote their reproductive rights. The action plan sets time-specific targets, committing nations to carry out concrete actions in such areas as health, education, decision-making, and legal reforms with the ultimate goal of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women in both public and private life. Its target is to ensure gender equity for women at all levels.

The creation and strengthening of national institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women have substantially enhanced the ability of states to implement the objects of the Platform for Action. The main task of these national machineries is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective into all policy areas, including education, legislation, programmes and projects. Reaching the goal of equality between women and men ultimately depends upon profound transformation in attitudes and behaviours at every level of the society, starting at the grassroots and continuing through the highest levels of government. National machineries can play an instrumental role in stimulating and nurturing these transformations at every level.

Universities are viewed as critical institutions for national development, providing a corps of educated elite to serve the community and nation. In Nigeria, university education started in 1948 with the establishment of the University College of Ibadan as a college of the University of London. The University College of Ibadan started off with 104 students, 3 of whom were females, described as "three hopeful young girls' who had 'high expectations of making a new Nigeria of highly qualified people and of high ideals' (Nzekwu, 1980). Since then, students' enrolment has grown significantly, though with larger increases in male student numbers than female.

The university is still an unfamiliar terrain to many female students and staff, especially in certain disciplines like Science and Technology and in Management. Examining both figure and policies in Nigeria, Pereira (2002) notes the "although university systems tend to be spoken of in gender neutral terms, the effects of their workings are far from gender neutral". The first female staff was employed in 1960, in the Department of History (Odejide, 2003). The percentages of female academic staff recruited in Nigerian universities in 1996/97 were: Social Sciences 9.2%, Science 12.8%, Arts 14.7% and Education 22.2%. (NUC, 2001 cited in Pereira, 2002).

University staff are more likely to be male, a phenomenon which can be explained by the pattern of access to higher education within the country. The gender distribution of staff at the University of Ibadan, the oldest of the

universities, in 2001 showed that nearly 80% of academic staff and 70% of senior administrators were male, 88.1% of professors, 78% of senior lecturers and 75% of junior lecturers were male.

Adadevoh (2001) argues that it is necessary for women to gain better qualification and experience suitable for leadership as they often proved to be more committed in their jobs. Acceptable criteria should be evolved for women advancement in teaching, service to the department and university committees, research and outlets for research. The politics of research and publication differs from institution to institution, and in Nigeria, it is also tied to the age of the university (whether first, second and third generation university), ownership (whether federal, state or private) and the type of university, whether conventional or specialized. An example of the new thinking about the weighting of research in relation to teaching for promotion purposes is the proposal in the University of Ibadan vision document to allocate up to 30% weighting to teaching competence (University of Ibadan, 2001). Such decisions are being made in the context of changing ideas about the relevance of tertiary education to national and community goals, globalization and the flow of knowledge between the North and the South. But they also have implications for considering affirmative action policies for women with regard to gaining access to positions of power and decision making in higher education.

Women in leadership positions have proved their mantle. Even in the academia, women are seen to show more commitment to duty than their male counterparts. Gender equity is needed to engage more women in the higher education sector in order to ensure its sustainable development. Women's groups are expected to help in this direction, although they seem to play an ambiguous role in projects to support women students and staff in higher education in Nigeria. In the 1970s conservative women's groups like the National Council of Women's Societies and the socialist feminist group, Women in Nigeria (WIN) helped galvanize feminist scholarship and facilitated the establishment of Women's networks such as the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD). Since the 1980s and the 1990s, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women's groups which focus on women in higher education. Some of these groups are discipline based like Girls and science and Technology (GASAT), while others are multidisciplinary like the Network for Gender Sensitive Education, the National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS), the Network for Women's Studies in Nigeria (NWSN), the Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) and the Ahmadu Bello Women's Study Group (ABWSG). Generally the women's groups that focus on higher education, aim to prioritize confronting the gender inequalities in their workplace and discipline. They act as support groups for women associated with higher education.

Since education is a vital force for development, gender equity in education is a

veritable stepping stone for the achievement of such goals that are meant to mainstream women fully in the male-dominated societies of the 21st Century. On the basis of this, the study was carried out to investigate the influence of gender on sustainable development of higher education in Akwa Ibom State.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to investigate the influence of gender on sustainable development of higher education in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to:

- (1) Determine the influence of gender on commitment to teaching by lecturers in higher educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State.
- (2) Determine the influence of gender on research and publication by lecturers in higher educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Hypotheses

The null hypotheses below were formulated to direct the study.

H_{01} There is no significant influence of gender on commitment to teaching by lecturers in higher institutions of learning.

H_{02} There is no significant influence of gender on research and publication by lecturers in higher institutions of learning.

Research Design

The survey research design was used for the study.

Target Population

The population of the study comprised students and lecturers from the Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, and School of Education, Akwa Iboom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit. This stood at 850 (115 lecturers and 735 students).

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of 415 respondents was drawn for the study. This was made up of 102 lecturers and 313 students. This was against the proposed sample of 450 (115 lecturers and 335 students) as all the administered questionnaire could not be retrieved. Two sampling techniques were used in drawing out the sample: purposive for lecturers; and stratified random sampling for students.

Instrumentation

Two separate instruments were used in collecting data for the study. These were (1) Gender and Commitment to Teaching by Lecturers.(GCTL); and (2) Gender and Research and Publication by lecturers (GRPL) questionnaire for students and lecturers respectively. Respondents were expected to indicate by ticking, the extent to which they agreed or disagreed to statements that were simply stated. Their responses were measured by means of a four category rating system as follows:

SA	4	Strongly agree
A	3	Agree
D	2	Disagree
SD	1	Strongly disagree

Validation of Instrument

The instruments were validated using the 'face-validation technique'. By this approach the instruments were given to two test experts who assisted in checking through the items and made the necessary corrections before they were finally produced for administration.

Reliability of the Instruments

Trial tests were conducted and analyzed using the Pearson product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis(r) to determine the reliability levels of the instruments. These stood at 0.71 and 0.73 respectively. This made the instruments suitable for use in the study.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using inferential statistics of t-test. The results of data analysis are presented below:

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant influence of gender on commitment to teaching by lecturers in higher institutions of learning.

Table 1
Responses of Students on the Level of Commitment to Teaching by Male and Female Lecturers

S/N	Items	Males lectures		Female lecturers		Dec
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	
1.	Regularity at lecturers	2.74	1.66	3.81	1.01	Sig.
2.	Giving of assignments to students	2.41	1.45	3.44	1.23	Sig.
3.	Return of marked assignments to students	2.11	1.01	3.82	1.64	Sig.
4.	Attention to student's problems	2.16	1.08	3.64	1.14	Sig.
5.	Relationship with students	2.18	1.44	3.12	1.44	Sig.

N = 313

Responses to the questionnaire items in table 1 above indicate a significant influence of gender on level of commitment of lecturers to teaching. The responses are in favour of the female lecturers as seen in the mean responses of the respondents. This applies to all the questionnaire items. The implication is that female lecturers in high institutions are more committed to teaching than their male counterparts.

Table 2: t-Test Analysis of the Influence of Gender on Commitment to Teaching by Lecturers in Higher Educational Institutions

Variable	Male Lecturers	Female Lecturers	t-cal	t-cri	Remarks
Commitment to teaching	5.81	12.23	10.78	1.96	Sig.

N = 313; t-critical = 1.96; alpha level = 0.05;

Table 2 summarizes the result of data analysis on hypothesis 1. The calculated t-value of 10.78 was greater than the critical t of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level and 311 degrees of freedom. This indicates a significant influence of gender on commitment to teaching by lecturers in higher educational institutions. As observed in the mean scores of the male and female lecturers, the female lecturers with a higher mean score of 12.23 are more committed to teaching than their male counterparts in higher educational institutions. The null hypothesis was subsequently rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant influence of gender on research and publication by lecturers in higher institutions of learning.

Table 3: Responses of Lecturers on the Influence of Gender on Research and Publication

S/N	Items	Males lectures		Female lecturers		Dec
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	
6.	Publications in International Journals	3.52	1.61	2.81	1.62	Sig.
7.	Publications in National Journals	3.03	1.18	2.22	1.73	Sig.
8.	Publications in Local Journals	3.21	1.58	2.46	1.71	Sig.
9.	Publication of Books	2.99	1.28	2.31	1.37	Sig.
10.	Joint authorship of Books/Journal articles	3.21	1.17	2.35	1.28	Sig.

N = 115

The analysis in table 3 reveals a significant influence of gender on research and publication by lecturers. Significant differences exist in the mean responses of the respondents in respect of research and publication by male and female lecturers in favour of the males. This implies that male lecturers engage in more research and publication than their female counterparts.

Table 4: t-Test Analysis of the Influence of Gender on Research and Publication by Lecturers in Higher Educational Institutions

Variable	Male Lecturers	Female Lecturers	t-cal	t-crit	Remarks
Research and Publication	9.33	4.01	8.11	1.96	Sig.

N = 115; t-critical = 1.96; alpha level = 0.05;

Data analysis in table 4 reveals a significant influence of gender on research and publications by lecturers in higher institutions. The calculated t-value of 8.11 was greater than the critical t of 1.96 to 0.05 alpha level and 113 degrees of freedom. The analysis is in favour of the male lecturers with a mean of 9.33 against 4.01 of their female counterparts. By implication, male lecturers engage more in research and publication than the female lecturers.

Discussion of Findings

Data analysis of hypothesis one reveals that gender has a significant influence on commitment to teaching by lecturers in higher educational institutions. The finding is in favour of female teachers. Analysis revealed that the female lecturers are more committed to teaching than their male counterparts. The finding agrees with Odejide (2003). The female lecturers take their work more seriously and are always available to assist the students in solving their problems. They exhibit better work behaviour than some of their male counterparts.

It can be argued, based on the finding that gender equity can bring about sustainable development in the higher education sector. Since the women are more committed to teaching, gender equity in employment at the higher education level would mean stepping up pedagogy in the institution. The credit hours allotted to each course would be properly utilized to boost teaching and learning in the institutions. This would reduce idle time and cut down on the rate of cult activities in the campuses.

In hypothesis two, the analysis revealed a significant influence of gender on research and publication by lecturers in higher institutions. The analysis favoured the male lecturers as their mean score was higher than that of the female. It follows therefore that male lecturers engage more in research and publication than their female counterparts. This is supported by studies such as Adadevoh (2001). Gender equity will therefore bring encouragements to the women folk in the higher institutions. Women would be encouraged to form research groups and devote more time to research and publication for sustainable development of the higher education sector.

Conclusion

On the basis of the data analysis and research findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Gender equity can facilitate sustainable development of higher education in Akwa Ibom State.
2. Female lecturers are more committed to teaching than their male counterparts given their feminine disposition.
3. Male lecturers are more involved in research and publication than their female counterparts.
4. Gender equity is necessary in the Nigerian higher education sector in line with The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings and conclusion drawn, it was recommended that:

1. Gender equity should be pursued meaningfully in the light of women's role in the development of education in particular and the nation generally.
2. Relevant laws should be passed to enhance gender equity at both the state and federal levels.
3. Women should be given greater chances to partake as lecturers and administrative staff in the higher education sector.
4. Special provisions should be made to encourage women involve more in research activities.

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