

MAKING A DIFFERENCE AS A WOMAN ACADEMIC

Being a Welcome Address Presented By

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ON THE OCCASION OF 1ST NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN IN ACADEMICS

Held at

**AKWA IBOM STATE POLYTECHNIC, IKOT OSURUA, IKOT EKPENE
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INTRODUCTION

I am indeed delighted to chair this august congregation in May! Particularly, I recall that I presented a lead paper at the inauguration of the association. It is fulfilling that the association is waxing strong and is hosting a national conference.

The philosophy of education in Nigeria is based on building a sound and effective citizenry and provision of equal opportunities for all at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system. To achieve this, two of the national aims and objectives to which the philosophy of education in Nigeria are linked are the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around, and the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in, and contribute to the development of society.

The Nigerian government expressly states in section 18 of the 1999 constitution that:

"Government shall ...

- *direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.*
- *promote science and technology*
- *strive to eradicate illiteracy;*

To this end government shall when practicable provide.

- *Free compulsory and universal primary education;*
- *Free secondary education*
- *Free university education; and*
- *Free adult literacy programme"*

Specifically, the national policy on women section 6.1.3 submits that “for (the) Nigerian women to enjoy the full benefits of contemporary living, they require basic education to contribute meaningfully to the development of the country.”

STATUS OF WOMEN IN ACADEMICS IN NIGERIA

The Federal Ministry of Education (2006) noted that female participation among the academic staff of all tertiary institutions is still low. For instance in the 2001/2002 session, the total number of Nigerian University teachers was 20,124 and out of this number, 3,174 constituting 15.7% were females while 17,040 (84.3%) were males. Moreover, in the Nigerian University system, there were a total of 2,442 Professors making up 12.1% of the total population of all the academic staff. The female Professors were very low in percentage (6.9%) (Okebukola, 2002). From the data above, it is glaring that men are the majority in the University.

Table 1: Status of Female Academics in relation to their male colleagues in S&T Faculties in the University of Lagos 1999-2009

Faculty	1999		2009		1999		2009		1999		2009		1999		2009	
	Professor & Associate professor		Professor & Associate professor		Senior lecturers research fellows		Senior lecturers & research fellows		Senior Lectures research & fellows		Lecturers research fellows		Ass lect. Junior research fellow		Ass lect. Junior research fellow	
	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)
Engineering	100	0	100	0	98.3	6.2	91.7	8.3	90.5	9.5	95.8	4.2	100	0	80.7	19.3
Environmental Science	100	0	77.8	22.2	85.8	14.2	82.4	17.6	91.3	8.7	80	20	50	50	71.5	28.7
Science	86.1	13.9	71.1	28.9	80	20	65.6	34.4	80.8	19.2	79.6	20.4	90.9	9.1	76.4	23.6
Pharmacy	92.8	7.2	62.5	37.5	35.8	64.2	66.7	33.3	42.1	57.9	60	40	0	0	0	0
Basic Medical Science	71.9	28.1	63.2	36.8	67.9	32.1	25	75	60.5	39.5	68.5	31.5	66.7	33.3	56.3	43.7
Clinical Medical Science	75	25	75	25	60	40	44.5	55.5	25	75	73.6	26.4	0	0	100	0
Total	86	14	76	24	72	28	62	38	68	32	79	21	91	9	74	26

Source: The African Symposium: An online journal of the African Educational Research Network

Table 2: Status of Female Professors in relation to their male colleagues in the University of Uyo as at April 2013.

s/n	Faculty	Male		Female		Total
		No.	%	No.	%	
1.	Agriculture	17	94%	1	6%	18
2.	Arts	13	68.4%	6	31.6%	19
3.	Basic Medical Sciences	5	83.3%	1	16.7%	6
4.	Business Administration	3	100%	-	-	3
5.	Clinical Sciences	3	100%	-	-	3
6.	Education	13	56.5%	10	43.5%	23
7.	Environmental Studies	3	100%	-	-	3
8.	Engineering	6	100%	-	-	6
9.	Law	2	100%	-	-	2
10.	Pharmacy	2	100%	-	-	2
11.	Sciences	13	93%	1	7.0%	14
12.	Social Sciences	14	100%	-	-	14
	TOTAL	94	83.2%	19	16.8%	113

Source: University of Uyo Senate records, April 2013.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

To make a difference, there must be a mark of distinction and style associated with your methods and strategies. You can motivate and increase the confidence of your students while you teach them and increase your own positive mental attitude. You need:-

1. **Empathy:** You have the ability to bond with your students, to understand and resonate with their feelings and emotions. To communicate on their level. To be compassionate with them when they are down and to celebrate with them when they are up.
2. **Positive Mental Attitude:** You are able to think more on the positive and a little less on the negative. To keep a smile on your face when things get tough. To see the bright side of things. To seek to find the positives in every negative situation. To be philosophical.
3. **Open to Change:** You are able to acknowledge that the only real constant in life is change. You know there is a place for tradition but there is also a place

for new ways, new ideas, new systems, and new approaches. You don't put obstacles in your way by being blinkered and are always open and willing to listen to others' ideas.

4. **Role Model:** You are the window through which many young people will see their future. Be a fine role model.
5. **Creative:** You are able to motivate your students by using creative and inspirational methods of teaching. You are different in your approach and that makes you stand out from the crowd. Hence the reason why students enjoy your classes and seek you out for new ideas.
6. **Sense of Humour:** You know that a great sense of humour reduces barriers and lightens the atmosphere especially during heavy periods. An ability to make your students laugh will carry you far and gain you more respect. It also increases your popularity.
7. **Presentation Skills:** You know that your students are visual, auditory or kinesthetic learners. You are adept at creating presentation styles for all three. Your body language is your main communicator and you keep it positive at all times. Like a great orator you are passionate when you speak. But at the same time you know that discussion and not lecturing stimulates greater feedback.
8. **Calmness:** You know that the aggression, negative attitudes and behaviours that you see in some of your students have a root cause. You know that they are really scared young people who have come through some bad experiences in life. This keeps you calm and in control of you, of them and the situation. You are good at helping your students de-stress.

9. **Respectful:** You know that no one is more important in the world than anyone else. You know that everyone has a place in the world. You respect your peers and your students. Having that respect for others gets you the respect back from others.
10. **Inspirational:** You know that you can change a young person's life by helping them to realize their potential, helping them to grow, helping them to find their talents, skills and abilities.
11. **Passion:** You are passionate about what you do. Teaching young people is your true vocation in life. Your purpose in life is to make a difference.
12. **Willing to Learn:** You are willing to learn from other teachers AND your students. Although knowledgeable in your subject you know that you never stop learning.

ADVANCEMENT STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

1. **Increase Education Levels:** Many women are already beginning to realize the importance of attaining higher academic credentials. The "terminal degree gap" between men and women is rapidly closing (Jones, 1987: 1-4). In 1980, twice as many men held the doctorate as did women. Today, for every two women at that academic level, there are only three men. If women are going to be successful in their efforts to acquire top level administrative positions, they must first return to graduate school and earn higher academic credentials.
2. **Master Job-Specific and General Skills:** Women must master both job-specific skills and general skills if they are to advance. There is no substitute for competence on the job. Fortunately, job-specific skills can be mastered through repetition and hard work. However, even more important to career

development, is a mastery of four general skills: reading, writing, computing and speaking (Josefowitz, 1980).

- 3. Capitalize on Opportunities to Network:** Women should make contacts at both the professional and the personal level. Professional contacts can prove beneficial to career advancement and educational development. Contacts at the personal level with colleagues at other colleges can yield ideas for solving shared problems and can also provide personal support regarding also establish a foundation for the next important recommendation.
- 4. Identify and Enlist Sponsors and Mentors:** Women should develop professionally oriented, informal affiliations with decision makers within their own institutions. From these contacts they can select mentors and sponsors. Mentors and sponsors can provide essential advice and open doors that are critical to advancement.
- 5. Take Advantage of In-Service Training:** Campus-based workshops for women on career development, leadership skills, assertiveness training, and communication can be valuable to the institution as well as the participants. When training opportunities are made available, either on-site or off-site, women should clearly communicate their interest in participating.
- 6. Expand Formal Affiliations:** Affiliate with national organizations, both professional and educational. These organizations can provide a wealth of information and learning resources. They can also provide opportunities for training and help expand professional networks. These organizations, especially those offering job announcements and professional placement services, can be extremely important to career mobility.

CONCLUSION

For most of us, there is at least one teacher whose name we will never forget – that favorite teacher who made a difference in our education. Teachers, who make a difference to inspire, engage, challenge and unlock the potential in every child. It is my sincere hope that this national conference will afford participants the opportunity to interact, generate ideas and report empirical research that will advance the course of women in academics. I will therefore end my welcome address with a brief letter to teachers.

Dear Teachers,

*Sometimes it may seem like people have forgotten how important you really are. Your creativity, your dedication, your passion. It is time for a reminder that for every child that says “I am not smart enough”, “I don’t get it”, “I can’t” there is a teacher that says **“YOU CAN!”***

For every child who needs basic skills, knowledge, someone to believe in him, there is a teacher who will do whatever it takes to encourage, motivate, challenge, engage, inspire and instill a love for learning. So every teacher who works with our children, youths and even adults, building a better future for all of us, one child at a time even when it seems like no one is watching or that people have forgotten just how special teachers really are.

*We salute you and thank you! So repeat “I make a difference!” for reaching each child to become the next great author, artist, scientist, architect, musician, librarian, engineer, doctor, pharmacist, teacher, lawyer, etc. **you make a difference!***

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