

## Gender Imbalance in Education as Perceived by Students in Tertiary Institution in Rivers State

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the perception of students in tertiary institutions towards factors influencing gender imbalance in education. Two research hypotheses were formulated. Descriptive research design was used for the study. A total of 1,115 students in tertiary institutions by Rivers State were selected through multi-stage sampling technique. Self-designed and instrument titled Gender Imbalance Inventory was the research instrument used in the study. Face and content validities of the instrument were determined by three experts and the reliability value of 0.68 was obtained using the test re-test reliability method. The inferential statistical techniques used for the data analysis was Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The study revealed that there was no significant difference in the perception of students on factors affecting gender imbalance in education on the basis of age ( $F(13, 1112) = 0.24; P < 0.05$ ). It however found significant difference in the perception of students on factors affecting gender imbalance in education, on the basis of religion ( $F(2, 1113) = 9.32; P < 0.05$ ). based on these findings it was recommended that government should make frantic efforts to educate rural and urban girls no matter their socio-economic status. It was also recommended that government should carry out enlightenment programme to sensitize parents and the society at large on the importance of women education.*

**Keywords:** Gender Imbalance, Women Education, female inferiority complex, women social identity.

### **Introduction**

The need for equal education of all sexes for overall development of mankind cannot be overemphasized. It is worthy of note that the educational and social policies of Nigerian government since independence can be blamed for the general inequality in education that pervades the Nation. Large-scale structural inequality is noticed in all sector of our educational system. It began with the Nigerian colonial experience. The British colonization of Nigeria may have hampered the family's inability to educate their female children because the colonialists emphasized that it was inappropriate to educate girls as opposed to boys Johnson, Markham & Oyinade, (2010) late Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the Western Region of Nigeria was the first Nigerian leader to realize the importance of providing basic education for Nigerians.

He introduced free compulsory education in Western Nigeria. Unfortunately, little attempts were made by succeeding governments to bring about equality in education. The administration of education was relegated to a lower priority. Instead, individual politicians uncontrollably looted public funds, thereby neglecting their greatest resources, the education of the girl child.

For a long time, the general assumption is that women are weaker cells and as such should not be treated seriously as an intellectual being because they were not well educated as men.

Once women enjoyed the same level of education as men, they would perform in the same intellectual competent way and would be accorded the same recognition as intellectual being.

All over the world, especially the advanced countries, education now recognized as the main vehicle for promoting and improving the status of women. Therefore, Nigeria should not lag behind in this new wave of development in the world. The new interest in the education of women is part of a general awakening that has taken place during the last two decades, Aluko (2013).

Gender imbalance in education continues to resolve around changing academic orientation, at all levels of learning. So many researchers and educators have concluded that educating girls will not only improve economic growth, but will benefit society at large. Hadden & London (2005) "if you train a women you educate the nation". It then implies that, sustainable changes in the education of girls and investment in the future are necessary to achieve sustainable education and gender balance. According to Johnson, Markham & Oyinade et al are societies discriminate on the basis of sex often beginning at the earliest stages of life.

Therefore, greater equality for the girl child is a necessary step in ensuring that women realize their full potential and become equal partners in development.

Gender has been used interchangeably within sex although it is not synonymous. Theories of human nature assumed that women and men are different in nature and are therefore, entitled to different rights, or lack of rights in political system of government, Roberts (2003). The major differences between women and men lie in culture, and not in nature. Aluko et al further explained that gender is socially constructed, not biologically determined. He further posited that it is enforced through cultural practices, such as the use of space, socio-political and legal institutions.

Two genders exist in all societies, masculine and feminine. However, masculine genders are socially valued more than feminine genders.

Girls and women are especially deterred from taking full advantages of basic educational opportunities because of reasons specific to individuals culture Duke (2007) some cultures see the girl and women as tenders of homes and bearers of children and so the girls are married off early to part way for the boys and a source of income for the family people don't seem to care about what happens to the young wife's aspirations or even her immediate family. The result of this is poverty, ignorance, diseases, lack of care, ill health and how economic fortunes, which cannot equip the girl child/woman to face the challenges ahead. This affects the family very negatively. This is particularly true because one cannot sow illiteracy and reap literacy or gain. We all know that the initiative of an illiterate woman/girl is more inferior to that of an educated woman, Ihediwa (2008).

Every educated woman is predisposed to work effectively in all sectors of our economy. Therefore, work is of very high importance in life of every human being, as a mark of responsibility. Everybody works for the same purpose, be it male or female, working for wages and salaries to support and later for the economic and social wellbeing of the family, for prestige and personal satisfaction since some culture debar or stop women from receiving education, the result is that girls and women have been short-changed in every aspect of our national life and developments. These facts have led to low productivity on the part of many women and young ladies. This has impacted negatively on the family.

Sex is a biological determined characteristics of men and women, while gender on the other hand is the characteristics of men on women, which a particular society has determined and assigned each sex. However, Ohiri Aniche (2005) observed that in educational system, gender is also important as it influences the curriculum, instructional materials, career choice, enrolment and general behaviour of pupils and teachers alike.

### **Women and Educational Imbalance**

Education is the totality of experiences through which one learns. The law of many countries of the world give equal educational opportunities to both boys and girls, but there has been a wide gender disparity concerning educations in different parts of the world, with boys and men being favoured more.

In view of this, Dupont in Okwubunka (2006) stated that;

“Women do not enjoy the educational opportunities that should have and often do not have any at all. Nearly every education than men, and over a vast area of the globe, the majority of illiterates are women”.

This highlights the disadvantages confronting women not only in education, but also in all other fields of endeavour such as political, social and economic activities.

Gender roles have relegated women to the background in most societies. It have prevented them from participating in and benefiting from development efforts. The society as a whole have suffered from the marginalization of half of its population made up of women. Countries that have raised the status of their

women educationally, socially, politically, economically, generally enjoy a high standard of living. Aubrey (2010). On the contrary, countries where women remain largely illiterate and relegated to the background have a low standard of living.

### **Statement of the Problems**

For a society to develop its human and Natural resources must work on harmony towards actualization of the dream. Such human resources include (among others) women. The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, gave Nigeria a low score card when it noted that in Nigeria, the percentage of girls who did not complete elementary education in the rural area was 32.1%, in the Urban centres it was 14.6%, as compared to boys with 20.1% rural and 7.4% in urban centres respectively. It was also reported by the forum that the number of girls who completed elementary school in the rural areas was 57.5% and urban 79.1% as compared to boys in the rural areas with a completion rate of 70.3% and 87.8% in the urban centres (Swaisson, 2003).

The outcome shows the fact that education imbalance gives birth to political inequality. This political dominance and exclusion deny women of their rightful place. There is no doubt that there is the problem of gender imbalance in our educational system in Nigeria. The society also has this notion that the best thing that can happen to a girl/women is to be married, and as such some parents marry off their daughters instead of sending them to school. Men further discriminate against the educated girl/women by refusing to marry them as a means of perpetuating the second-class accorded women. Illiteracy and lack of education is responsible for women's low income generating capacity, inferior social status, superstition, early marriage, inability to access reproductive health care service, and low level of aspiration, which has affected the family socio-economic development.

We should take note of the fact that women play alot of (varied) roles in nation building. They bear and train children, run their homes, help in running their communities and ensure that peace prevails.

They work on farms to produce food and engage in petty trading, thereby constituting the economic life wire of the nation. Therefore, every country and Nigeria in particular must improve the lots of women through education of the girl-child in order to prepare them for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and for Nation building, bearing in mind that "when you educate a man you educate an individual, but when you educate a women, you educate a nation. The most serious problem is that as far as the knowledge of the researchers is concerned, there are only few empirical studies carried out in this area. Most of the works are theoretical and more conceptual than empirical. Ohiri-Aniche (2010) Aluko (2013), Olokum (2012), Duku (2008). None of these studies here was carried out among tertiary institutions students, hence the justification for this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the perception of students in tertiary institution towards gender imbalance in education.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the conduct of the study:

1. Are there differences in the perception of students on factors influencing gender imbalance in education on the basis of age?
2. Are there differences in the perception of students on factors influencing gender imbalance in education on the basis of religion?

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is no significance differences in the perception of students on factors influencing gender imbalance in education on the basis of age.
2. There is no significant differences in the perception of students on factors influencing gender imbalance in education on the basis of religion.

### **Methodology**

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey. This study used the survey research to determine the expression of students in higher institutions towards gender imbalance in education.

The target population for this study was drawn from all students in tertiary institutions. Multi-stage Sampling Techniques was used to select the samples of the study. Purposive Sampling Techniques was used to select one tertiary Institution, each from the Senatorial Zones in Rivers state. The Stratified Random Sampling Techniques was used to select the students according to their level, age and religion. This is to make the work more representative. Simple Random Sampling was used to select 400 Respondents each from the three tertiary Institutions namely, university of port Harcourt, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. This was to give equal opportunities to the population who study. On the whole 1,200 respondents were given questionnaire out of which 1.115 properly filled their questionnaire which represented 92% return rate.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument use for this study was a self-designed instrument titled “Gender imbalance inventory” (GII). The instrument has two major sections. Section A is made up of the bio-data of the respondents which comprise institution, age, level, sex and religion.

Section B of the institution comprised items designed to elicit responses of students on their perception of factors responsible for gender imbalance in education. These include historical, sexism, and religious, educational and political, socio-cultural and economic factors. The instrument is on a 4 point Lickert type scale of strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Content validity was used for the study. To ensure the validity of the instrument, experts in counseling from the department of educational psychology guidance and counseling university of Port Harcourt subjected the instrument to scrutiny. The experts certified the instrument as having contents validity.

The test-retest method of reliability was employed to ensure the reliability of the instruments. Twenty five copies of the questionnaire was administered to as set of 25 students twice after four weeks intervals data from the test-retest were correlated using Pearson product moment correlation using Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient formulas. A co-efficient of 0.68 was obtained, this was considered reasonably reliable, hence the suitability for use in this study.

The researcher made use of two research assistants in administering the instruments on the respondents in the three tertiary institutions used for the study. Training sessions were held with the research assistants to intimate them with the purpose of the research, the nature and the content of the questionnaire forms.

Inferential statistical technical used to analyze the data collected was analysis of variance. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.005 alpha levels. This section presents the results of the analysis of data that were collected from the investigation based on the null hypotheses generated.

### **Discussion**

The result of this study shows that there is no significant differences in the perception of students of tertiary institutions and Rivers state on factors influencing gender imbalance on the basis of age. The findings is not in accordance with the work of Aluko (2013) who established that none of the three major religions in Nigeria, namely; Christianity, Islam and traditional religions, endorse equality between men and women. This finding is also not consonance with the findings of Eisinga, Den, Agen and Vertoo (2009) who found that both Christianity and Islam justify gender inequality. In consideration of the above findings it is crystal clear that litman have distinctive inspired traits and roles. The differences between sexes are conceived to be the God’s creative work and therefore, beyond human capacity to change.

### **Counselling Implications**

The study revealed gender imbalance in education as perceived by students in tertiary institutions. Education has been recognized as the central ingredient to development. In present women age should not be discriminated from acquiring education like their male counter parts counselors should play more emphasis on the possibility of equal educational opportunities for both male and female as against the religious beliefs about women.

Guidance counsellors are closer to the students in the secondary schools, therefore are in a better position to direct and counsel the students on their various careers. They are also expected to relate with the parents of the students and inform them on the need for equal education to both boys and girls. This notion and cultural belief that boys' education is more important than the girls' should be corrected in secondary schools and tertiary institutions through guidance and counselling programmes. Counsellors should intensify efforts to impact on the lives of female students. Guidance programmes should be organized to encourage the females to be determined to read and delay gratification till later date in their lives.

Adequate publicity should be given to the career prospects existing in the tertiary institutions for both boys and girls. Counsellors should organize programmes highlighting the talents and natural potentials of females. It is the duty of school counsellors to explain various avenues or opportunities where female students can be given scholarship to read "male dominated courses such as engineering, medicine, architecture, mathematics etc. They should place priority on the structural constraints which allow traditional attitudes to prevail. This may eventually encourage both group and individual counselling. To actualize this, some strategies like the rational emotive behaviour and behaviour modification therapies can assist to bring about the desired behavioural changes, techniques such as cognitive restructuring, assertive training and shaping will assist the counsellors. Cognitive restructuring technique for instance can be used to help females learn to rationally restructure their irrational beliefs passed on to them by the society to always be at the background. Also through shaping, some reinforcements can be selectively used to bring certain desired changes in their behaviour to have positive self-concept and high self-esteem of themselves. Accretive training technique will help females to be honest with themselves and have belief in their ability to excel in the so called male dominated professions.

### **Recommendations**

It is therefore, very imperative that vocational and career counselling for girls and women be carried out regularly, not only in schools, but in the communities to acquaint them with the world of work and to enable them enter into careers, businesses and trades that are worthwhile, thereby equipping them for the onerous tasks ahead of them as mothers and future mothers.

The curriculum content in various disciplines are gender based, schools encourage the educational gap through teachers' attitude and pedagogy in learning materials and the school environment. Curriculum materials, texts, convey sexist messages known to discourage either male or female learners.

There is gender stereotype of disciplines whereby secretarial studies is typed feminine while science, mathematics and engineering are types masculine. Religion and socio-cultural beliefs also affect the easy access of female to higher education. Many females have dropped out of school due to some of these reasons under discussion. The idea of the religions not involving women in decision-making, socially, politically, legally and domestically should be played down so as to be involved in the scheme of things. In many disciplines especially in science technology based courses males perform better than females and are more in number in those professions.

Most girls are inferior in nature and as such it influenced their academic performance. Some of them underestimate their own academic ability and believe boys to be superior and intelligent than them and therefore more capable of handling difficult subjects like science and mathematics. The outcome of this study has confirmed the existence of gender imbalance as perceived by the students. There is therefore, the need for a change in attitude by females, parents and government policy to bring about sustainable economics, social and political development. Government should make frantic efforts to educate the girl child in the rural and urban areas not despite their socio-economic status in order to provide the option to take advantage of newly afforded opportunities in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Government should carry out an enlightenment campaign in order to sensitize parents and the society in the importance of educating women. Emphasis should be placed on the accruable benefits of women education to the individuals and the nation at large.

The government in its policy should provide enabling environment that will be supportive of females rather than males. This is referred to as female friendly school environment by UNICER which includes toilet facilities, portable water, secured hostels accommodations etc. These could attract and subsequently motivate the female to participate effectively in schools.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study and the discussion that followed, the following conclusion were drawn

1. There was no significant difference in the perception of students on factors affecting gender imbalance in education on basis of age.
2. It has also been established that a significant difference exist in the perception of students on factors affecting gender imbalance in education on the basis of religion.
3. The implication is that concerted efforts should be made to improve the reduction to the bearest minimum the issue of gender imbalance if not completely removed.
4. The research result revealed that lack of self-esteem, poor self-manage and non-assertive behaviour are among the factors that make the girls shy away or perform poorly in school and particularly in science, mathematics and technical subjects Echebe (2017). These attitudes are formed among the female-child because they grew up in a society where as a member of a minority, her social identity is permanently fixed and negatively evaluated.

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