

## Women in Higher Education: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Dr. Adesoji Olubunmi Omoniyi

Department of Science Education,  
Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo State, Nigeria

---

**Abstract:** In Nigeria, higher education is recognized as a key force for modernization and development. The issue of women underrepresentation in leadership positions in Nigeria public Universities remain unattended to, despite the efforts and agreements been made by world bodies and countries to address the issue and ensure even development. One of such agreements was the affirmative action made during the Beijing Conference held in China 1995 which demanded 30% of women for every political position. The fact remains that credible and qualified women are found in different works of life, apart from the political arena, and these women play significant roles to keep and maintain life system; but it appears that most leadership positions in Universities are occupied by men without due consideration for women, equity and fairness. University governance being micro segment of the general polity in Nigeria which contributes to the individual, national development and advancement needs both masculine and feminine leadership to have a balanced administrative set up in terms of appointment of Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Registrars, Bursars and Librarians. This study gives an overview on the factors responsible for underrepresentation of women in principle positions in Federal and State Universities in Ondo State, Nigeria and proposes a new action plan for government to bridge the wide gap between men and women in leadership positions in Nigerian Universities. Two universities were randomly selected from Ondo State, Nigeria comprising one Federal and one State University. A descriptive survey and expo facto designs were used for the study. A questionnaire consisting 20 items were administered on 200 respondents who were Academic and non-academic staff from the selected two Universities. 5 Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. Results showed that 95% of the positions in the selected two universities were occupied by male. Also, results from respondents showed that lack of support and motivation; discrimination against women, among others are barriers inhibiting women occupation. The study concluded that the 5% occupied by female should be increased to meet the recommended percentage of 30% for women by the United Nations in the Beijing Conference in China in 1995 so as to meet the challenges for the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Higher education, women, underrepresentation, leadership, positions, challenges

---

Date of Submission: 07-04-2020

Date of Acceptance: 21-04-2020

---

### I. Introduction

The issue of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Nigeria has been a matter of concern to women folks. Nigeria has been in place for centuries and many have come to accept the anomaly as normal. However, with the feminist movement, the above claim is being questioned and a rethink is now evolved to correct such faulty assumption, likewise a call for gender sensitivity in leadership positions in higher institutions especially to the female sex as they have suffered mistreatment of various kinds. The arguments here is that, the concept of leadership does not stimulate that, it is the exclusive fight of a particular sex. The female sex is no less human, it is also a rational being just as the male counterparts. Leadership is more of a rational enterprise involving all categories of persons and does not border on biological/physiological function.

The biological attributes of the sexes should not be used as a yardstick for socio-political nor, should it be used to determine performance index of any of the sexes.

Leadership entails the ability of a person or group of persons to command obedience to rules for the realization and achievement of the stated goals of an organization. This quality or attribute involves men and women. It is wrong therefore, to alienate a particular sex and strip it off of any opportunity to lead simple on account of sex. This phenomenon is very dangerous and unhealthy for growth and development of a 21st century Higher education. Nations and individuals have made concerted, collective and individual efforts to address the issue of underrepresentation of women, knowing the fact that lack of gender balancing hampers national development. No wonder [9] decried the situation whereby a large number of corporate giants still have no women Directors on their Boards. She further opined that women's unequal representation in leadership positions poses multiple concern. Example of such international efforts towards gender parity is the Beijing Conference of 1995 which sets a target that by 2020, the percentage of women in policymaking body should be 30%. There is no doubt that Nigeria; a signatory to the international agreements is committed to making efforts

to achieve this parity. In traditional Nigeria society, women duties were regarded as subordinates to men, their contributions to national development are not recognized while the men folks acquired economic and political powers, made policies and laws and women had to abide by these policies and laws, the making of which they were not part of [7].

The concern of this study is whether the positive wind of change in gender equality is being felt in Nigeria public university leadership positions.

Since the era of Prof. Grace Alele Williams, a onetime of the Vice Chancellor (VC) in one of the Federal Universities, very few women have attained the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC). In my university where the researcher is working, the university has existed for 20 years and only one female Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) has served for a tenure of two years. For Nigeria to rank high in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and be compliant with the Beijing Affirmative Agreement, there is an urgent need for women to be in leadership positions in Nigerian Universities as well as in other works of life. Adequate gender representation is necessary in the development of every sector of Nigeria’s economy because equal access and meaningful participation are preconditions to ensuring mutual contribution of men and women in ideas, developmental, directors, policy and practices [8] Nigerian women are responsive to the demands of organizational effectiveness and as such deserve equal access to leadership position in universities.

Tables 1 and 2 below showed Gender distribution of Leadership position in Nigeria Federal and State Universities.

**Table no1: Gender Distribution of Leadership Position in Nigeria Federal Universities**

Geo Political Zone	S/No	Federal University	VC		DVC ADMIN		DVC ACADEMIC		REGISTRAR		BURSAR		LIBRARIAN		% Distribution
			MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	
South-East	1	Micheal Okpara University of Agnculture, Umudike	M	--	M	--	NA	NA	M	--	M	--	M	--	100% Male
South West	2	University of Ibadan	M	--	M	--	--	F	--	F	M	--	M	--	Male =67% Female =33%
South South	3	University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt	M	--	M	--	M	--	--	F	M	--	--	F	Male =67% Female =33%
North Central	4	University of Jos	M	--	--	F	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	Male =83% Female =17%
North East	5	Federal University of Technology, Yola	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	100% Male
North West	6	Abubakara Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	100% Male

Source: Emenalo and Okeke, 2016

**Table no 2: Gender Distribution of Leadership Position in Nigeria State Universities**

Geo Political Zone	S/No	State University	VC		DVC ADMIN		DVC ACADEMIC		REGISTRAR		BURSAR		LIBRARIAN		% Distribution
			MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	
South-East		Imo State University/Owerni	--	F	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	83% Male 17% Female
South West		Olabisi Onabarjo University Agohvoya	M	--	M	--	M	--	--	--	M	--	M	--	Male =100%
South South		Delta State University Abraka	M	--	--	F	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	Male =83% Female =17%
North Central		Kogi State University Anyigba	M	--	--	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	Male =100%
North East		Gombe State University, Gombe	M	--	M	--	NA	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	100% Male
North West		Kano University of Science & Technology	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	M	--	100% Male

Source: Emenalo and Okeke, 2016

Informed by this situation, this study aimed at finding out the number of women occupying leadership positions of Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Registrars, Bursars, and Librarians in two public universities in Ondo State, Nigeria (One Federal University and One State University) and also identify barriers that could be responsible for women underrepresentation in leadership positions.

Two research questions were raised for the study:

- (i) What is the number of women in leadership position in the selected federal and state universities in Ondo State?
- (ii) What could be responsible for women underrepresentation at the top echelon of university administration in the selected universities?

## II. Method

The study adopted a descriptive and survey design. The respondents were 200 university staff comprising 100 respondents (50 males and 50 females) from each of the two universities – Adekunle Ajasin University, (AAU), Akungba Akoko and Federal University of Technology, Akure(FUTA), Ondo State. The selection of the respondents was based on stratified random sample method from the seven (7) faculties in AAU comprising both academic and non-academic members of staff. Also, in FUTA, the same method was adopted in selecting the sample. An instrument tagged “Factors Responsible for Gender Distribution of Leadership Position in Nigerian Universities” (FRGDLPNU) comprising 20 items was used to collect data. The item focuses on the identification of the number of females in leadership positions in the two universities as well as the barriers inhibiting them from getting to such position. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

## III. Results and Analysis of Findings

Table 3 presents the results

**Table no 3- Frequencies and percentages of male and female who occupy the seats of principals officers in the selected two universities between 2009-2019.**

Name of University	VC		DVC Admin		DVC Acad		Registrar		Bursar		Librarians	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
AAUA	2	-	4	-	4	1	3	-	1	1	2	1
FUTA	2	-	4	-	4	-	1	2	2	-	2	-

**Source:** field work 2019

Data in Table 3 reveals that in AAUA there were no female VC, 20% of the position of DVC for female, 50% of position of Bursar for female, no female Registrar and no female librarians within the period of study (ten years). Also, in FUTA, the situations is even worse. Data in Table 3 reveals that there were no female VC, no female DVC (Admin and Academic), no female Bursar and Librarians. The University had two female Registrars consecutively during the period under study.

### Summary of findings

- Male academics occupy 100% of the seats of Vice Chancellors in AAUA and FUTA
- Male academic occupies 75% of the seat of DVC in AAUA and 100% in FUTA.
- Male occupy 100% of the seats of Registrar in AAUA.
- Male occupy 50% of the seats of Bursar in AAUA and 100% in FUTA.
- Male occupy 100% of the seats of librarians in both AAUA and FUTA.

Results from the respondents revealed and identified the underlisted factors as some of the barriers inhibiting women occupation of the position of principal offices in the universities.

- 1) Lack of support and innovation
- 2) Discrimination against women as weaker sex
- 3) Lack of self confidence in women themselves
- 4) Some see women as being too strict and autocratic when in leadership positions.

## IV. Discussion of Results

Data in table 3 reveals that the percentage of leadership position occupied by male is 100% on three of the principal positions in AAU and 100% in four (4) in FUTA. By inference, it is evident from the results that the percentage of leadership positions occupied by female is abysmally small. It is clear that there is gender disparity and female underrepresentation in university administration in Nigeria. Also, some of the barriers

identified above such as lack of support and motivation; discrimination against women as weaker sex; and seeing women as being autocratic when they get to leadership position are all obnoxious beliefs which need to be corrected from the minds of the people.

The above findings agree with the results of [2] that women filled only 20% or less of the seats in Federal and State-owned colleges of Education in Nigeria. Also, the study agrees with [5] that women occupied less than 17% of leadership position in Nigeria Universities.

### **V. Conclusion**

It is evident from the study that there is women underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Nigeria universities as a result of some biased barriers. Women should be given a favourable climate within the university to attain leadership positions once they are qualified for the position so as to enable them exhibit their potentials.

### **VI. Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made to bridge the gap between male and female occupying leadership position in Nigeria Universities

- (1) The six principal leadership positions in the university should be evenly distributed to a ratio of 3:3
- (2) University Governing Councils should make it a policy that in any University where the VC is a male, one of the DVCs should be a female
- (3) When a woman is aspiring for a leadership position, other women should support, and not to view the women that is aspiring as a weaker sex.

### **References**

- [1]. Agulana, G. G. (2006). Barriers to Academic Leadership for Nigerian Female Lecturers WOREC Journals of Gender Studies 1(3) 222-231.
- [2]. Alberta Government (2015). Alumen service. [www.disralberta.ca/careerplanning/education/jobs](http://www.disralberta.ca/careerplanning/education/jobs)
- [3]. Bobson, A and Bell, D. (ed) (2006). Environmental Citizenship. The MIT Press. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Edinburgh), London.
- [4]. Dupe, A. (2003:36). Are women Better Managers in the work place? Lifestyle Business Times, 2016.
- [5]. Emenalo & Okeke (2016). Gender Disparity in Leadership position in Nigerian Universities. New perspectives in Gender Studies – pp. 270-287.
- [6]. Obasi, V. A. (2006:14)- Gender, Education, Inequality and Women Empowerment. Journal of Women Academics. Published by National Association of Women Academics, IMSU 4 1(1) 11-23.
- [7]. Oluchukwu, N. (1990). Women's World. "Women's Role must be Recognised". Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> April, Daily Star Newspaper.
- [8]. Onyere, U (2006). Nigeria leadership participation: Issues, Constraints and Prospects WOREC Journal of Gender Strategies 1(3) 160-171
- [9]. Sellers, P. (2007). What Barriers Held Women Back. The chronicle Review of Higher Education. Section B (B4)
- [10]. Sterling, S. (2001). Sustainable Education: Revisioning Learning and Change, Schumacher Briefings: 6, Green Books Publishers, London.

Dr. Adesoji Olubunmi Omoniyi, et al. "Women in Higher Education: Challenges for the 21st Century." *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 10(2), 2020, pp. 10-13