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SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Gender Equity in Nigeria's Educational System: A Necessity for Socio-Economic Development



Abari Ayodeji Olasunkanni^{*}, Lagos State University,
Department of Educational Management, Ojo-Lagos, Nigeria
Muhammed Mubashir Olayiwola Babatunde,
Lagos State University, Department of Educational Management,
Ojo-Lagos, Nigeria
Gbenu Jide Pius, Lagos State University, Department of Educational
Management, Ojo-Lagos, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper is devoted to education of women as a key precondition for improving family health as well as the socio-economic status of the entire country. Education empowers women to participate in decision-making in the society and thus gives them the opportunity to make positive decision affecting their lives. Since the situation in the country is such that favours men as against women, efforts should be made by governments at all levels to educate and encourage the girl child through their parents on the need to go to school by introducing various policy measures. The authors suggested some of the measures that can be adopted to national education policy which should include free education for girls, lower grades for girls as against that of men, more hostels for girls to remove them from household chores, legislation against forced marriages as practiced in some parts of the Northern country, bursaries and scholarships should be given to girls especially those on science, technical and engineering programmes

KEW WORDS: *women, education, labour force, gender imbalance, self-employment, developing countries, Nigeria*

^{*} E-mail: ayodejiabari@yahoo.com

Introduction

Equity as defined by Hornby (2000: 389) refers to “fairness and justice” implying that inequity is unfairness and injustice. There is indeed high discrimination against women in the world generally and in particular developing countries in virtually all fields of human endeavour. A number of studies have found out that the socialization of children remains traditionally sex-typed, even when mothers are employed outside the home, there is an early and strong socialization in terms of work segregation by sex. According to White and Brinkerhoff (1981: 41) for example, women’s employment “sinks their daughters even deeper into domestic role and the older children get, the more stereotypical become their work assignments”. The 2006 International Women’s Day brought alarming messages from Latin American delegates about the growing rate of ‘femicide’ in their countries. In Guatemala according to Lakkshmanan (2006: 58) for instance, “housewives, teenagers and college students have disappeared and later been found naked, disemboweled, sexually mutilated, beheaded and dumped in abandoned lot. Similar stories have come from Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Mexico”. Thus, gender is one of the universal dimensions on which status differences are based. Women have always had lower status than men, although the extent of the gap between the sexes varies across cultures and time. Chitins (1993: 78) on her studies in India found out that women were well represented in all professions in the country although access to higher education was often restricted for girls who live in rural areas and in towns without colleges or universities. In Indonesia, Setiadarma (1993: 96) discovered that in the 16 – 29 years age group, only one out of fifteen women (or 7%) was in higher education and that participation rates of women were particularly low in science and technology. Concerned about the rate of entry of women into higher education, Alele – Williams (1993: 52) tried to find the causes.

Education of women is a key to improved family health as well as the socio-economic status of the entire country. Education empowers women to participate in decision-making in the society and thus gives them the opportunity to make positive decision affecting their lives.

The situation described above concerning women is not different in Nigeria, perhaps worse. Sex inequality is deeply embedded in Nigerian culture to the extent that in reality, both men and women themselves have deeply internalized the belief in the appropriateness of the latter’s

deference and subordination. Groups outside the family (e.g. peers, friends, community organizations, work structures, the government, etc) tend to support and encouraged gender inequality and reinforce men's and women's 'innate' inferiority and responsibility to serve others. It is therefore no more a piece of news that there is a high discrimination against women the entire world over and in particular in Nigeria because the culture encourages it. What is a piece of news however is that the discrimination is also felt in the field of education in favour of men especially at the university level in Nigeria. The traditional cultural setting of the country compounds the academic situation of Nigerian women. The Nigerian society perceives the female learners not to be suitable for the rigours of academics and also to be weaker than their male counterparts. They are viewed as inferior species of human beings that do not worth any serious educational investment. Traditionally, women are expected to depend on their husbands for their daily needs, hence most parents prefer training the male children. Poverty is another major factor that militates against educating the female child. Nigeria's is one of the poorest countries of the world with an annual per capita income of \$320 as against that of USA which is \$10,945 (World Bank, 2005: 43). In line with this gloomy picture, UNESCO (1990: 14) says, "Nigeria is also one of the countries identified as accounting for 75.2% of the world's illiterate", a view corroborated by Ezinwa (1990: 23) on the account that "Nigeria as at 1990 ranks 5th among the ten most illiterate countries in the world".

Even though earlier researches have established that investments in female education increases both the family and national productivity, and thus income, generally little attention is paid to female education in Nigeria. As a result of high discrimination against women in the entire world, which is well pronounced in the education sector, the focus of the paper is therefore to examine the level of lopsidedness in male – female enrolment in Nigerian educational system, bring out the socio-economic implications of educating then girl child and suggest how the lopsidedness can be corrected or improved most importantly because this is one of targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Need to Promote Gender Equality in Nigeria

The Global Poverty Report (2002: 46) which was the outcome of the Millennium Summit held in September 2000 in New York, United States

of America had as one of its goals the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment and the year 2005 was proposed as the target date preferably for elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, and at all levels of education by 2015. Indicators set for the attainment of this goal also aim at measuring progress towards ensuring that more women become literate, have a voice and representation in public policy and representation in public policy and decision – making process including improved job prospects. It is emphasized that gender equality is not only a desirable outcome but also a crucial input for a country's ability to reach all other development goals. The Report therefore resolves to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as an effective way to fight the impact of poverty, hunger diseases, control population, growth and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. In the expression of the Report United Nations Declared, “there is no time to lose, if we are to reach the Millennium Development Goals by the target of 2015. Only by investing in the worlds of women can we expect to get there”. Indeed Nigerian women had suffered a lot of deprivation according to Oladunni (2004: 65). In her words:

poverty is prevalent among them. The worst case exists in the Northern Nigeria where urgent assistance is required to address the situation. Unemployment is rife among the female gender, consequently, they are worse off as a result of education leading to illiteracy, early marriage, low birth weight, hunger and other deprivation. These vices assist the vicious circle of poverty among the women generally. Nigerian laws are gender neutral, yet evidence abound that much is not being done in favour of women regarding education generally and in particular at the university level.

In support for the education of women, Emunemu and Ayeni (2003: 102) assert that:

in the personal sphere, education enhances a woman's self – confidence and sense of capacity. In the public sphere, it increases her income – earning potential and development... The education of women is perhaps the most crucial factor in reducing fertility levels and infant mortality and in promoting the overall well – being of the family. It is believed that investing in girls and women is a *sine qua non* for the achievement of sustainable development and that educating girls and women delivers the highest return of any development input.

According to UNESCO (1993: 48), “each additional year a young girl stays in school translates into a 10 to 20% increase in wages”.

According to Emunemu and Ayeni (2003: 102), “studies in India confirm that women who had completed high school earned one and half times more than those without education and women with technical training earned three times more than illiterate women. This is to say that education enhances women’s productivity level and should be encouraged.

Disparity Level of Male/Female Education in Nigeria

According to Shobowale (2002: 59), female education in Nigeria progressed slowly between 1842 (when formal education was first introduced in Nigeria) and the end of the colonial era and advanced more rapidly during the decade of the 60’s and 70’s. In Nigeria, there were 37, 43, and 44 women per 100 males for the year 1970, 1980, 1985 respectively at the primary school level. At the secondary school level, there were 32 females per 100 males in 1970, 35 per 100 in 1980, 43 per 100 in 1985 and 1990. The tertiary enrolment shows 15 females per 100 males in 1970, 21 per 100 in 1980, 27 per 100 in 1985 and 1990. The situation is even more pronounced in science-based courses generally in sub –Sahara Africa with the mean enrolment put at 20 females per 100 males (World Bank, 1988). According to UNESCO (1990: 14), “male post-secondary enrolment in developing countries outnumbered that of females by a factor to one”. The trend in Africa was revealed to be worse because more men than women had access to higher education by a factor to of almost three times. This poor enrolment of women in higher education according to Shobowale (2002: 59) “automatically led to women’s under-representation in professional and leadership positions”.

Statistics from Federal Office of Statistics (1995: 8) shows that enrolment figures in the formal sector favour boys than girls right from primary school which is put at 40% against 60% (in favour of boys). Consequently, according to Shobowale (2002: 60), “the higher the educational level, the more the disparity”. It has also been established that male – female disparities are very pronounced in the 16 – 24 year age group where the population of males (51%) enrolled in school is almost twice that of females which is put at approximately 27%. At the tertiary level, total female enrolment and graduate output in the university was 27.1% while that of polytechnics was about 1.5% (Federal Office of Statistics, 1995). Table 1 shows enrolment of students at the primary, post-primary and university levels in Nigeria by sex as given by National

Bureau of Statistics (2005: 10) from 2001 – 2005 which in actual fact was in favour of men.

Table 1: Enrolment into primary, post-primary and universities by sex in Nigeria from 2001-2005

Years	Primary		Post-primary		Universities	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2001	10,805,722	8,457,812	3,241,566	2,286,818	231,633	127,125
2002	11,070,610	8,791,072	3,713,864	2,578,310	274,131	170,818
2003	14,433,764	11,338,280	4,063,475	3,107,829	373,778	232,326
2004	11,141,614	8,895,866	3,077,911	2,310,823	492,874	234,534
2005	11,712,479	9,239,339	3,079,832	2,342,779	466,159	258,697

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2005)

Figure 1: Primary school enrolment from 2001-2005

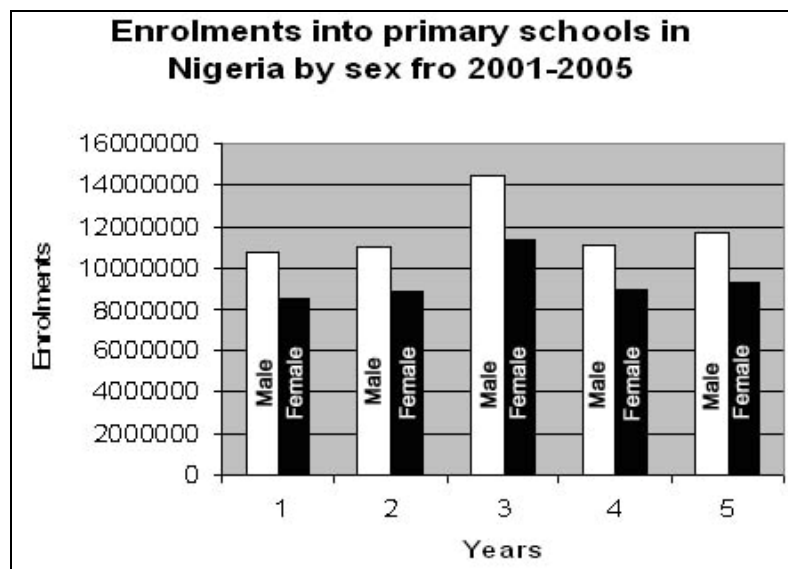


Figure 2: Post-primary school enrolment from 2001-2005

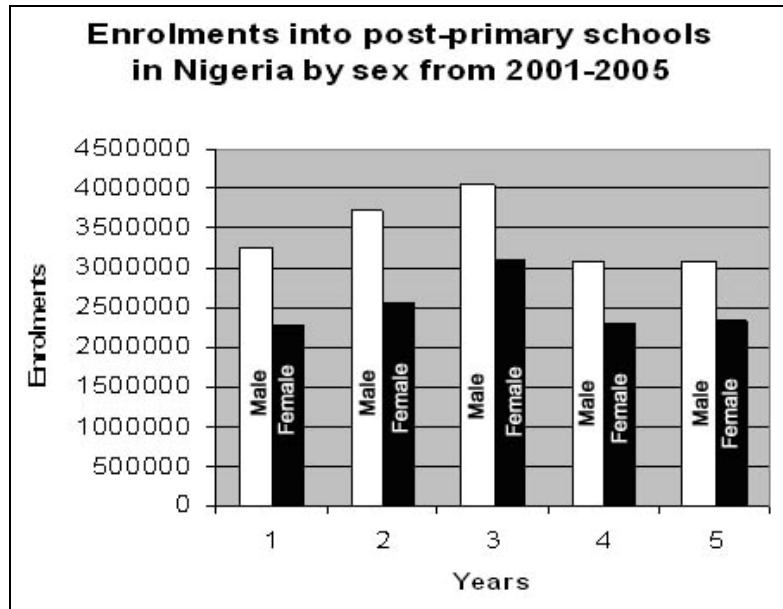


Figure 3: Enrolments into universities in Nigeria by sex from 2001-2005

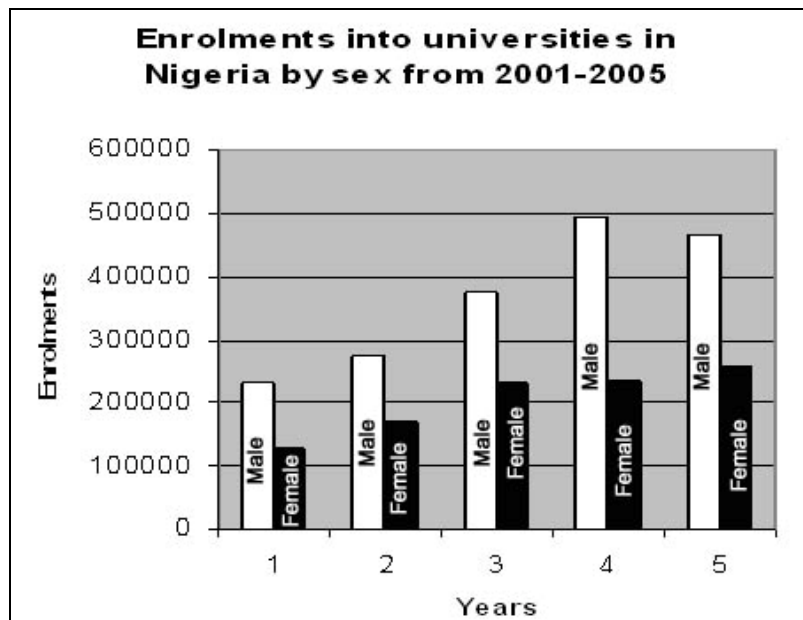


Table 1 shows enrolment into primary, post-primary and universities in Nigeria for a period of five years (2001-2005) and represented by Figures 1, 2 and 3 respectively for the three levels. This picture paints Nigerian women at a disadvantage in terms of access to education for the three levels considered.

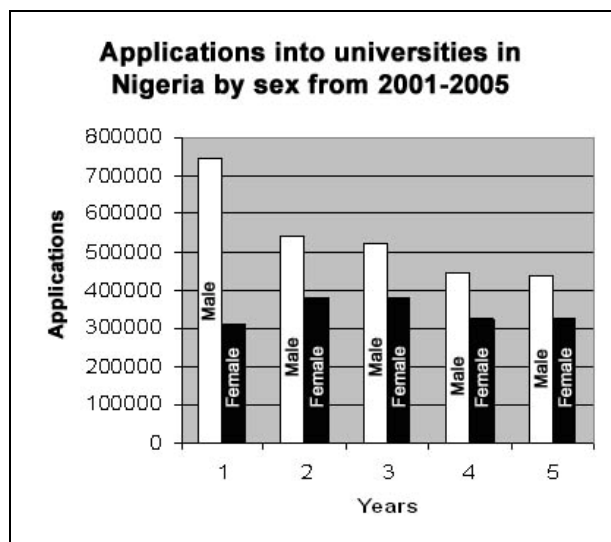
In terms of application into Nigerian universities, the situation is still the same with men having perhaps undue advantage over the women, after all, recent statistics from Nigerian Population Commission shows that both sexes are almost at par. Why then should there be stunning wide disparity between the two sexes within the educational set-up? Table 2 shows the total number of applications into Nigerian universities for five years from 2001-2005.

Table 2: Applications into Nigerian universities from 2001-2005

Years	Applications	
	Male	Female
2001	743,725	312,892
2002	538,827	382,423
2003	525,564	382,487
2004	446,285	323,871
2005	438,378	323,603

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2005)

Fig. 4: Applications into Nigerian universities from 2001-2005



In the same vein statistics on graduate output by bachelor's degree, post-graduate diploma, master's degree and doctorate degree from 2001-2005 still favours men against women as shown by Table 3 and depicted by Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 3: Graduate output by bachelor's degree, postgraduate diploma, master's degree and doctorate degree from 2001-2005

Years	Bachelor's degree		Postgraduate diploma		Master's degree		Doctorate	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2001	29,782	18,009	7,573	2,516	7,714	3,106	543	147
2002	35,989	22,316	5,060	1,707	10,994	4,157	578	143
2003	41,252	29,109	3,471	1,939	10,748	3,308	553	199
2004	30,105	20,314	3,762	1,833	8,529	3,963	577	217
2005	15,327	10,715	3,162	1,489	6,352	2,033	336	92

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2005)

Figure 5: Graduate output by bachelor's degree from 2001-2005



Figure 6: Graduate output by postgraduate diploma from 2001-2005

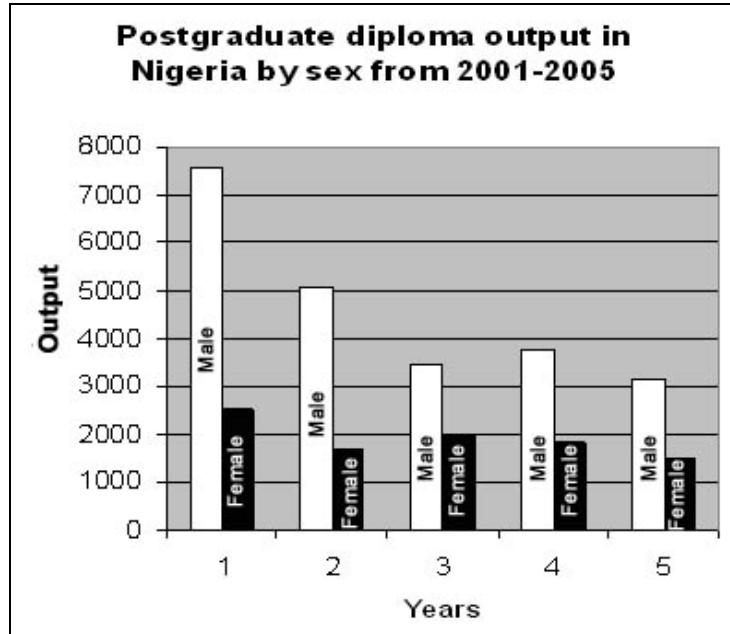


Figure 7: Graduate output by Master's degree

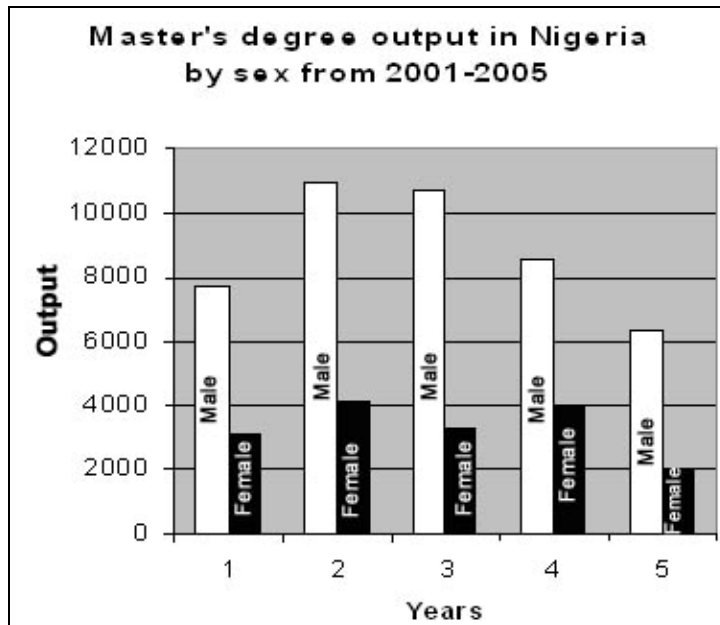
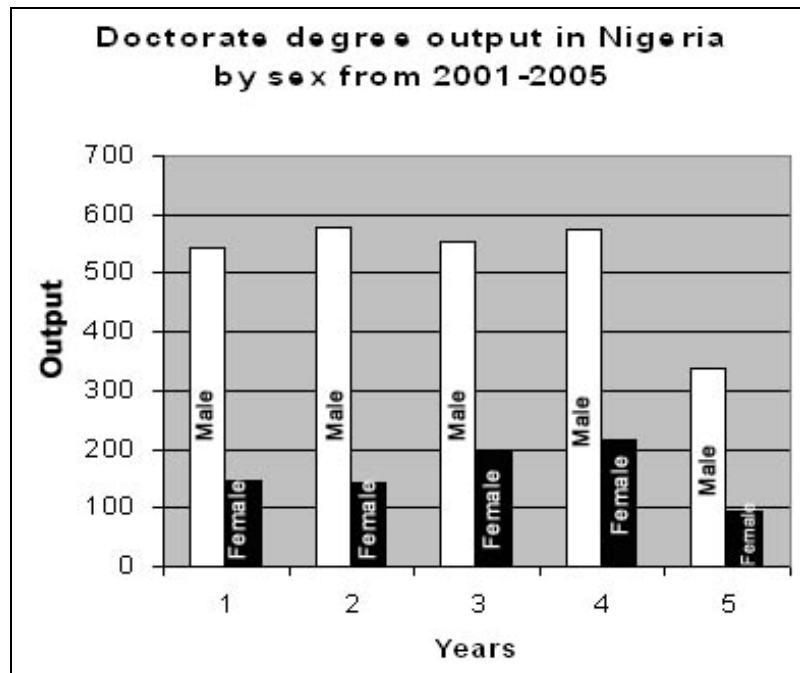


Figure 8: Graduate output by doctorate



Labour Force: Women at a Disadvantage

The fact that women are at a disadvantage in admission and enrolment exercises in Nigeria is a piece of evidence to the fact that gaining equal advantage with men in the labour market especially at the university graduate level is unrealistic. Indeed, higher education labour force seems to be the prerogative of men especially at its management level. This is to say that the gender imbalance in female school enrolments at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels had inevitably affected the number of women that move up to management level both in academic and administrative centers. This is true of general paid employment in the country as attested to by the statistics given below.

Apart from self-employment where the average percentage distribution favours women as against men, all other forms of employment (government, parastatal, private business, and private persons, i.e. households) considered from the angle of regular employment and casually employed, the advantage was towards men. This is an indication of higher

access to various opportunities by men in Nigeria as encouraged by the society. Ironically, women seem to be self-employed more than men implying that majority of them more often than not are found at home. This is not encouraging considering the socio-economic relevance of women in the society.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of the working population by employer, sex and employment status (2005)

Activities	Government		Parastatal		Private business		Private persons		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Regular employee	98.6	98.6	85.9	76.8	19.2	11.1	1.8	1.0	17.8	8.8
Casually employed	0.6	0.5	4.1	3.5	4.9	1.6	3.0	0.8	3.1	0.9
Self-employed	0.7	0.9	8.9	16.9	72.3	82.2	83.9	78.5	70.9	74.8

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2005)

A major constraint against the participation of girls in education is the real and perceived lack of labour market opportunities as supported by Table 4. It is generally recognized that men have a wider range of choice with regard to jobs due to labour market segregation even in a context of shrinking formal sector markets in the country.

Equity in Education: A Necessity for National Socio-Economic Development

The implications of educating the girl child can be seen in the numerous advantages or relevance stated earlier. In the area of politics for instance which has been dominated by men for decades, plain level ground can be provided for them and more women in politics means that women's interest can be brought to the fore. At home, a highly educated mother stands the chance of training her children in a desired way and keeps a

manageable family. Whatever job an educated woman is involved in, there is always a difference. Such a woman also stands the chance of getting a good job with fat salary which improves the economic status of the family. At the societal level, enlightened women can form various associations and clubs from where their voices can be heard at the national level and their problems addressed. As schooling improves, the mother's knowledge and use of health practices also improves. It is through sound education had by women that they can be involved in policy formulation especially on matters affecting them. These are some of the few benefits accruing to women when properly educated, hence the need to provide a plain level ground for women and men in all situations.

Suggested Measures to Improve Female Education

- Gender disparity can be removed in access, progression and accomplishment at all levels of the education system.
- Penalties can be introduced and enforced against school pupils, teachers and other educational personnel engaging in sexual harassment and making school girls pregnant.
- There could be effective legislation which will make it a punishable offence as done in some states in the country for parents and guardians who withdraw children from school prematurely.
- Girls can continue to be admitted to schools at all levels with lower grades than boys.
- More boarding places could be created for girls to allow them concentrate on their studies at reduced costs if not free.
- There could be special bursary schemes for girls especially those on science, technical and engineering programmes.
- Girls who were forced out of schools prematurely or who were pregnant along the line could be readmitted.
- Guidance and counseling programmes that will address the socio-cultural problems which may hinder the progress of girls in education could be introduced and strengthened.
- Female teacher trainees in sciences, mathematics and technical subjects should be enhanced and encouraged.
- The government can work with ministries, NGOs, community leaders on the need to influence parents/guardians to release

girls from domestic chores in order for them to have time to study.

Conclusion

Education should be seen as the right of all and sundry in Nigeria which must be offered to them. Since the situation in the country is such that favours men as against women, efforts should be made by governments at all levels to educate and encourage the girl child through their parents on the need to go to school by introducing various policy measures. Some of the measures that can be adopted include free education for girls, lower grades for girls as against that of men, more hostels for girls to remove them from household chores, legislation against forced marriages as practiced in some parts of the Northern country, bursaries and scholarships should be given to girls especially those on science, technical and engineering programmes. It is by doing this that the hope of taking the nation to the next developmental level (economically, socially, morally, culturally and politically) can be guaranteed, after all, where have the men taken the country to since all these years?

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GENDER INEQUALITY QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to solicit information on problems encountered by women/ladies in terms of gaining admission into universities. Every information given will be treated in strict confidentiality.

SECTION A (Personal Characteristics)

University	
Faculty	
Department	
Programme of study	
Year of study	
100L	1
200L	2
300L	3
400L	4
500L	5
600L	6
700L	7
Others	8
Specify	
Age last birthday	
15 – 19	1
20 – 24	2
25 – 29	3
30 – 34	4
35 – 39	5
40 and above	6
Father's highest level of occupation	
No schooling	1
Quranic	2
Adult literacy	3
Primary	4
Secondary	5
Tertiary/post secondary	6
Don't know	7
Father's type of job	
Farming	1
Trading	2
Labourer/cleaner/artisan, etc	3
Low level professionals/typists/ clerks	4

Middle level professional: teacher/nurse, etc	5
High level: doctor/tertiary lecturer/judge/lawyer	6

SECTION B (Mode of Admission)

University Matriculation examination (UME)	1
Direct Entry	2
None of the above	3
If 3, specify among the following	
Remedial studies	1
Basic studies	2
Pre-degree studies	3
Other (specify)	4
Did you influence your admission?	
Yes	1
No	2
If yes, was it because you are a female?	
Yes	1
No	2

What special action (if any) was taken on your behalf to influence your admission?

.....

SECTION C (Admission Experience)

Did you find gaining admission into the university difficult?	
Yes	1
No	2
Do you think, in your opinion that your admission into the university was made difficult because you are female?	
Yes	1
No	2
How many times did you attempt JAMB before you got admitted?	
Once	1
Twice	2
Thrice	3
More than three times	4
Never attempted JAMB	5
If you attempted more than once before you gained admission, was it because you were not extremely brilliant or brilliant?	
Yes	1
No	2
How will you rate your level of brilliance?	

Extremely brilliant	1
Brilliant	2
Average	3
Below average	4

SECTION D (University Admission Policy for Female Students)

Are you aware of any university admission policy in favour of female students in your school?

Yes	1
No	2

What is the nature of the policy?

.....

In your opinion, do you think women/ladies should not be at par with their male counterpart in terms of admission exercise?

Yes	1
No	2

If there is any university admission policy, how effective is it?

Very effective	1
Effective	2
Not effective	3

What do you think can be done to improve on the university admission policy?

Put in more resources	1
Improve on the personnel in charge of implementation	2
Create more awareness	3
Make more rules for implementation	4
Other	5
Specify.....	

Do you believe women/ladies do not have access to university education as their male counterparts?

Yes	1
No	2

Women/ladies' inability to have increased/equal access to university education like their male counterparts is as a result of any or combination of the following factors

Cultural beliefs	1
Parental educational background	2
Parental financial status	3
Discrimination against women by the university in terms of admission	4
Others	5
Specify	

Suggest ways of increasing access to university education by women.....
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.....
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