



Determinants of Gender Inequalities affecting Women's Participation in Higher Educational Institutions in Maiduguri

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Abstract

This study assessed the determinants of gender inequalities affecting women's participation in higher educational institutions in Maiduguri. The study aimed at determining prevailing gender inequalities faced by women participating in higher education, the factors, and efforts of empowerment strategies to address these inequalities. The study was anchored on the patriarchal theory of state and adopted mixed method design of qualitative and quantitative. Systematic sampling technique was used to select 295 respondents using structured questionnaire design. The data was collected, transcribed, and analysed using statistical package for social sciences. The study revealed that cultural bias against women prevented their appointment to top administrative leadership positions in higher educational institutions. The findings of this study also revealed patriarchal beliefs against women's position in the society placed them as recipient of persistent inequality practices. The study also revealed that empowerment strategies like education are other measures that can be used to address inequality practices against women. The study recommends improved government efforts at enforcing policies and prosecution of human right violation to achieve human right of women in the society. The study also recommends mainstreaming gender perspectives in higher educational institutions.

Keywords: inequality, women, participation, higher education

Introduction

Gender equality is an endemic social problem that affects nations, communities, classes, and gender. Gender inequality refers to unequal, disparity, imbalance, unfair distribution or access to resources and participation in opportunities between male and female gender

(Onogwu, 2021). Inequality practices and experiences have continued to exist between nations, communities, family, class and persons globally and nationally (Maduka, 2024).

Several global efforts were made to address discrimination and inequalities against women which influenced Nigerian women who developed the National Policy on Women in 2000, followed by the National Gender Policy in 2006. These efforts led to yet a review of the 2006 National Gender Policy in 2021. These National Gender Policies articulated gender inequalities perpetuated in different social institutions in Nigeria for decades (NGP, 2021). These inequalities have been attributed to local and external patriarchy, discriminatory socio-cultural practices, colonialism, capitalism etc. For instance, before the 1970s, development processes which include education and economic activities were said to be gender insensitive, male-cantered, and women-exclusive globally (Boserup 1970). In addition, women's participation in formal education was limited to courses that were believed to be feminine like teaching, home economics, secretarial studies, and Nursing (Carlton, 2023).

In northern Nigeria, discriminatory cultural and religious practices occurred due to parent's preference to male children (Adeosun, 2021). Males were sent to school while females were forced into early marriages. In many cases, the girls drop out of school to marry. Girl-child early marriage is encouraged by Islamic religion and Sharia law (Usman & Musa, 2021). Consequently, gender inequality in education widens the gender literacy gap, affects the number of women available for employment in the formal sector and raises female dependency in the north (Abubakar, 2023). Despite the efforts above, in recent times the emergence of the Islamic sects known as "Boko haram" in North Eastern Nigeria, originated in Maiduguri. The sect believes that Western education is an abomination. Their activities, which became large-scale in 2009, have resulted in the killings, maiming, and abduction of many but targeted attacks and abduction of female students from schools (Ngwoke, 2020). For instance, 276 girls were abducted from a school in Chibok community Borno state in 2014 (Afzal, 2020). These have resulted in many girls being withdrawn from school and sometimes forced into marriage out of fear and claim for girl's protection. These are barriers that sets back efforts to increase women's access to education to improve their employability and their general economic status (Ayodeji, 2020). This study focused on

inequality in the education sector. It assessed the inequality experiences of women in a higher educational institution in Maiduguri and the efforts of strategies like the NGP and women empowerment strategies in addressing inequalities faced by women. In particular this paper will assess the level of empowerment of women who have accessed higher educational qualification in northeast Nigeria. In addition, it will ascertain how their empowerment has influenced them to be able to negotiate and challenge inequality practices that hinder women from participating in topmost management level in the University of Maiduguri.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, the study investigated determinants of gender inequalities affecting women's participation in higher educational institutions in Maiduguri. In specific terms, the study objectives include:

1. To determine the forms of gender inequalities faced by women participating in higher education.
2. To ascertain the determining factors experienced by women participating in higher education
3. To assess the perceived influence of empowerment strategies in address these inequalities affecting women's participation in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored on the patriarchal theory of state as its main theoretical framework, propounded by Maine 1861 as described (Pierik, 2022), titled 'Legal Fictions' and published in 1861. The main proposition of this theory is that men in the society make the decisions of the activities of the society. In Nigeria, the patriarchal culture has led to male children being valued over female children. This trend of discriminatory practices at family and community levels is further translated to the national development processes. This patriarchal culture limits women's roles to mainly domestic chores and has been described as the single major impediment to gender equality. Makama (2013) references the common belief in Nigeria that 'the best place for women is in the "kitchen". Okafor (2023) in a study

on gender inequality practices in education generally in Maiduguri, found out that stereotyped attitudes of males and females towards the education of females in Maiduguri are a barrier to women's participation in other sectors in Nigeria. Although this theory provides insight to the gender relations of men and women in different spheres of life including family and education however, it has influenced the bias and preferences accorded to the men in the society. These preferences have been found to disadvantage not only the women but nations as well. Patriarchal theory of state influenced the cultural ideology of male domination and female subordination. The theory provides possible explanation to reasons why women may be invisible in top administrative positions as the men feel that the society assigned them to lead women and take decisions on behalf of women and their families.

The theme of the Patriarchal Theory of the state explained that decisions in societies and families are taken by the men and not necessarily in conjunction with the women. This originated from Patriarchal culture of male domination and women's subordination (Pierik, 2022; Ritzer, 2020).

Method

The study was carried out in the University of Maiduguri, which is located in Maiduguri metropolitan area in Borno State, North Eastern Nigeria. Maiduguri has an estimated population of about 1, 112 449 million (Usman et al, 2021) and the major religion practiced is Islam with Christianity in the minority. The study adopted mixed method of qualitative and quantitative design and the instrument of data collection includes Focus Group Discussion question guide. In addition, structured questionnaire was administered to the respondents for quantitative data collection. Multi stage sampling technique was used was used to select 295 respondents using Taro Yamane made up of academic and non-academic staff of the university, with the help of 1 research assistant. The quantitative data was processed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21 while the qualitative data was thematically analysed and reported.

Results

Participants

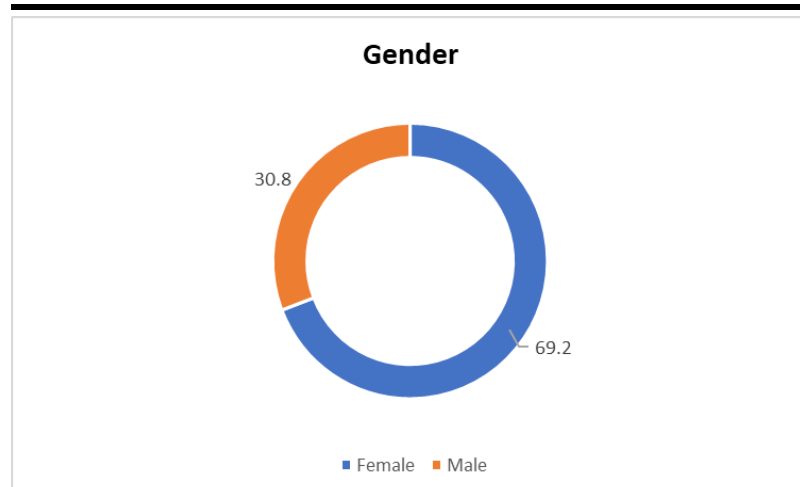
A total population of the population area was 5,106 members of males and females staff of University of Maiduguri, Borno State were (Federal Ministry of Education ,2021). Out of this number,295 respondents were drawn using Taro Yamane Formular(Obianefo et.al. 2022). Multistate sampling technique and simple random sampling were combined to draw the 295 respondents from five randomly selected faculties.

Instruments

The study used both structured and semi-structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was used to cover more respondents and get diverse opinion from men and women from different ethnic groups and backgrounds while the semi-structured questionnaire guide was used to sample the opinions of participants for the focussed group discussions and key informant interviews. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections A and B where the A group comprised of socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents while the B group comprised of the questions that addressed substantive issues of the study. The questionnaire also consisted of multiple-choice questions where the respondents had the option of choosing multiple responses. The data collected using structured questionnaires were processed with the help of SPSS version 2025. The data collected using for the quantitative method were analysed through descriptive statistics including frequency counts and simple percentages. On the other hand, data collected by the qualitative methods were thematically analysed and results presented in line with the objectives of the study.

The findings for this study contain multiple responses, presented in percentages and graphs

Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex



The figure presented above revealed that a large percentage of respondents are females (69.2%) however women are still lacking in top leadership positions in the University of Maiduguri. Since its inception in 1975, the university has not had a female Vice-Chancellor or Registrar till date. This shows that despite their presence in the work force they are not given adequate opportunity to compete favourably with their male counterparts in the employment sector.

Table 1: Causes of inequality practices affecting women's participation

Sn.	Causes of inequality practices affecting women's participation	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Ranking
1	Bias that women who work disrespect their husbands	259	98.5%	1 st
2	Non-recognition of women's rights	238	90.5%	2 nd
3	The belief that women who work will be exposed to male sexual advances	230	87.5%	3 rd
4	Discrimination that there are certain jobs women cannot do	229	87.1%	4 th
5	Poverty	217	82.5%	5 th
6	Bias that women do not need money because husbands cater for the families	184	70.0%	6 th
7	Gender roles and workload at home preventing women from working	177	67.3%	7 th
8	Religious restriction	173	65.8%	8 th
9	Lack of confidence in women's leadership	147	55.9%	9 th
10	Cultural practices	120	45.6%	10 th
11	Male preference	92	35.0%	11 th

Source: Field Survey, 2023. Multiple responses.

The table presents the various forms of inequality practices that affect women's participation in higher educational institutions. The top ranked inequalities include bias against working women, non-recognition of women's rights, discrimination against women in employment and appointment, socio-cultural and religious practices against women.

During the FGDs at the University of Maiduguri, one of the participants responded thus:

“Some men think that once a woman is educated, she becomes disobedient to her husband, and she will not be home when the man wants her. Some men do not consider women as human being with rights who can help them. Some women also don't know anything, they don't know what they can offer” (Female University staff, July 2024).

A female participant in the FGD session at the University of Maiduguri affirmed the observation that many husbands' fears of threat to their male position in the family poses a serious barrier to women's participation in paid work even after overcoming barriers in access to education. It was a common experience as expressed by the female group of discussants at the university of Maiduguri.

Discussion

This study used qualitative and quantitative analytical methods to address the determinants of gender inequalities experienced by women working in the tertiary institution of higher learning in Maiduguri, Borno State in the Northeast Zone of Nigeria. The women workforce was over 60% of the total population of workers and yet, no woman was ever appointed to any of the principal offices since its inception in 1975. This showed that the women were not being given equal leadership opportunities. This situation was not peculiar to the institution (Maduka et. al, 2011). This finding was an anchorage of the theory of the patriarchal system.

The causes of these perceived and observed inequalities ranged from fears that working class women disrespected their husbands, non-recognition of women's rights and the fear that those women in offices would be exposed to sexual advances by the opposite sex accounted for 80% to over 90% among the respondents. Cultural and religious factors

were also established to have played their contributory roles in the causes and consequences of the inequalities. The findings revealed that inequality is still persistent in higher institutions especially top management cadre thereby violating their rights to free participation, still consistent with the reports (Maduka 2024; Maduka & Okafor, 2011). The study also found that empowerment through education is an effective measure to eliminate inequalities that prevent women from participating at all levels of activities in higher institutions.

These findings highlighted a societal context where traditional gender roles are strictly enforced, limiting women's opportunities for professional growth. Economic factors, such as poverty and financial dependence on male partners, also played a significant role in perpetuating gender inequalities. The index study overall, revealed that cultural and religious practices further restricted women's participation, reinforcing traditional roles and limiting their access to leadership and decision-making positions.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Studies

Achieving effective empowerment of women to participate equally with men will promote productivity, increase women's earning and their general socio-economic status. Consequently these will result in their contribution toward Nigeria achieving its sustainable development

goals and vice versa.

This study recommends the followings:

1. Improved government efforts at enforcing policies and prosecution of human right offenders.
2. Mainstreaming gender perspectives in from the family level to the formal social institutions like educational and political institutions.
3. Massive advocacy campaigns by the ministry to government institutions, cultural leaders, religious institutions and academic institutions.
4. Enforcement of National gender policy guideline on affirmative action that demands a least 33% representation of women in committees and leadership positions.

Education system should be gender sensitive to raise awareness and contribute to advocacy campaigns.

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