Analysis of Factors Responsible for Gender Gap in the Appointment of Vice-Chancellors in Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract: *The paper looked at gender gap in appointment of the Vice-Chancellors in Universities in Nigeria. The paper employed both primary and secondary data. The secondary data were collected from print sources and online publications. The paper concluded by identifying low female academic representation in the appointment of University Heads (Vice-Chancellors) in Nigerian Universities. The paper identified cultural factors, poor implementation of gender policy on appointment of universities administrators; political influence, few female in the academia, low interest in leadership positions and weak institutions as factors that has contributed to low representation of female academics being appointed as Vice-Chancellors in Nigerian Universities. Based on these findings, the paper recommended that government should ensure gender policies are implemented in all the Universities in Nigeria in terms of appointments and selection of academic leaders especially Vice-Chancellors. Institutions established for ensuring gender equity should be strengthened with legislations to carry out their functions. Government should use social media and other socially accepted media to enlighten the populace and where it is expedient, challenge discriminatory gender norms, patriarchal practices, beliefs, early marriage practices and stereotypes that curtail girl education and female educational attainment in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Appointment, Gender, Vice-Chancellors.*

Introduction

Under international standards, both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities to everything worldwide, most especially to participate fully in all aspects and at all levels of political processes. Globally, women constitute over half of the world's population and contribute generally in vital ways to societal development. In most societies, women assume some key roles, which are: mother, producer, home-manager, community organiser, socio-cultural and political activists. Of these many roles mentioned, the last has been engendered by women movement. In line with global trend, Nigerian women constitute nearly half of the population of the country. Despite the key roles they play as mentioned above and with their population, women in the society generally are yet to be given appropriate recognition in many areas including the educational sector. This is due to some cultural stereotypes, religious beliefs, traditional practices and patriarchal family structures. The awareness about the role of women in development of a nation came up in 1980s. The International Conference on women in Beijing in 1995 enhanced the involvement as well as participation of Nigerian women in Nigerian politics (Oluyemi, Undated).

In Nigeria, about 51% of women are involved in voting during elections. This notwithstanding, women are still under represented in both elective and appointive positions. Available statistics revealed that overall women political representation in government of Nigeria is less than 7% (Agbalajobi, 2010). This shows that Nigeria has not attained 30 percent affirmative action as prescribed by the Beijing Platform of Action. Nigeria has been recording low participation of women in both elective and appointive positions which is a growing concern to many Nigerians. However, concerted efforts have been made by government and non-governmental organisations to increase the level of participation of women in politics, in line with the declaration made at the Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing which advocated 30% affirmative action. However in Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions (Oluyemi, Undated).

Several efforts have been made to address the low representation of women in elective and appointive positions in Nigeria; among such efforts are the establishment of Women Political Empowerment Office and Nigeria Women Trust Funds and Women Lobby Group. Other efforts include the institution of an INEC gender policy, the national multi stakeholder dialogue; the initiation of several interventions to actualise affirmative action and the convening of the Nigeria Women Strategy Conference. National Center for Women Development in collaboration with National Bureau of Statistics is also making efforts to have evidence based data about this issue. At present, the available data has not been harmonised. The data collation covers the period of 1999 – 2015 (Oluyemi, Undated). Despites all these policies and programmes, women representation in various leadership positions is still low especially in educational institutions like the Universities.

Research available showed that only few females are appointed as Vice-Chancellors in Nigerian Universities. The study by Ogunode (2023), on gender distribution of Vice-Chancellors in Nigerian Federal Universities revealed that 76 % of Vice-Chancellors appointed as administrators of Federal Universities are male academics while female academic made up of 24%. This result showed that female representation in the administration of Federal Universities is low compared to male academics. Another study by Dada, Ogunode and Ajayi (2022), revealed that there are low female representative in the leadership (principal officers) of public universities in North-Central Nigeria. This paper aims at discussing factors responsible for gender gap in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors of Universities in Nigeria.

Concept of Vice-Chancellors

Leadership in the University system has to do with the ability to get things done with the support and cooperation of other people within the institution, organisation or system. Leadership in the Universities in Nigeria is handled by Vice-Chancellors. In Nigeria, the Vice-Chancellors are regarded as critical academic leaders because of their executive powers and roles attached to their offices. Vice-Chancellors are the head of the Universities in Nigeria. Their roles and functions are very crucial to the development of the university system in Nigeria (Ogunode, Ezema & Ayoko, 2022).

The Vice-Chancellor is the principal academic and administrative officer of the University. He chairs the Council of the University, the General Board of the Faculties and the Finance Committee of the Council. Among the main tasks of the Vice-Chancellor are to provide academic and administrative leadership to the whole University; represent the University externally; secure a financial base sufficient to allow the delivery of the University's mission, aims and objectives; carry out certain important ceremonial and civic duties (Ogunode, Haliru, Shehu & Peter, 2023).

There are different leadership positions in the Nigerian university system: The leadership of governing councils, leadership of principal officers and academic leadership. The appointment and selection of the first one which is leadership of governing councils is done by selection and appointment following the university act by the Visitor. The second leadership position is done through a committee directed by the university management. This is done through laid down university laws (Ogunode & Agyo, 2022).

To get a new Vice-Chancellor, a vacancy is declared in newspaper advertisement six months before the end of the tenure of the incumbent. Conditions are stated in the advertisement which includes: number of years of post-professorial qualification, academic and administrative qualifications, and experience in various other capacities. At the close of the deadline for submission, candidates are shortlisted. Interviews can take place in different formats, depending on the tradition or the preference of the Visitor, Board of Trustees or Governing Council (Ogunode, Atobauka, & Ayoko, 2023).

The other levels of leadership positions are done within the university management. The Vice-Chancellors of Nigerians Universities are empowered by law to appoint the Heads of Departments, Deans of Faculties and Directors of Units and Directorates. Deanship position in some universities is done by election. Deanship tenure is two years. According to (Ogunode, Ezema and Ayoko 2022), appointment and selections of Vice-Chancellors depend on the type of university: federal, state or private as well as the type of private university-secular, faith-based or hybrid. Another factor is whether the appointment is for a pioneer Vice-Chancellor or a successor.

The appointment of Vice-Chancellors and other academic leaders in the universities are supposed to be in line with the declaration made at the Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action. However in Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions. Studies by Shehu and Sarkinfada (2022), Mohammed and Zaid (2014), Kolawole, Adeigbe, Adebayo and Abubakar (2013) revealed that neither elective position nor appointive position have reached 35% affirmative action. They sought for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions. Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) maintained that the factors and issues of women marginalisation and low participation in political leadership and decision making have been attracting a lot of attention from scholars. Although women and men have different biological and physiological make-up, women who share common features with men in terms of educational qualifications, socio-economic status and occupation, among others are still marginalised in virtually all spheres of social and public life.

Factors Responsible for Gender Gap in the Appointment of Vice-Chancellors in Federal Universities in Nigeria
The following factors were found to be responsible: cultural factor, poor implementation of gender policy on appointment of universities administrators; political influence, few female in the academia, low interest in leadership positions, weak institutions and patriarchal practice.

Cultural Factor
Cultural factor in Nigerian society have affected women development especially in the area of occupying leadership positions in both public and private institutions. Cultural factor has contributed to poor representation of female academics in the various leadership positions in

Nigeria universities. Ogunode and Salman (2023), observed that the cultural factor in Nigeria has also contributed to gender imbalance in the Nigerian university system. Olorunda and Ngunan (2011), Ogunode and Ahmed (2021) and Ikwuegbu (2022), submitted that culturally, Nigeria is gender stratified. The importance of gender of a person is a real issue in Nigeria and very much determines one's place in the educational, economic, social, political, and religious strata. There is glaring inequality in almost every aspect of the Nigerian society. It is an existing reality that cannot be easily ignored, both in the family, social, religious and economic institutions as well as in polity. Enough women are not empowered educationally and given opportunities in the labour force and worse still in the area of leadership (Sarkinfada, 2022; Ogunode & Solomon, 2021; Ogunode, 2020). Statistics conducted in 1990 revealed that a very minimal percentage of women were professors, about 1.8% of all the professors in Nigeria are females. Furthermore only 11% of women participated in the Nigerian economy as against 30% of men (Olonade, et al: 2021). Studies conducted by Egun and Tibi, (2010); Hassan (2011); ActionAid (2011); Ngara, & Ayabam, 2013; Okoronkwo-Chukwu, 2013); Famolari (2014) and Ogunode (2020a); revealed that the reason for the inequality is fundamentally due to the historical, cultural, and patriarchal structure of the traditional Nigerian society.

Poor Implementation of Gender Policy on Appointment of University Administrators.

The poor implementation of gender policy on appointment of leaders in the universities in Nigeria has led to low representation of female academics as Vice-Chancellors in the Universities. Ogunode and Salman (2023) argued that the Nigerian government has been reluctant to implement laws to improve gender equality in politics despite a formal/oral support for it. There are no formal bars on women taking office and the Nigerian constitution (1999) guarantees equal political rights. The (National Gender Policy 2006) recommended a benchmark of 35% of seats in parliament to be filled by women. The country is also a signatory to international agreements. The government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 and endorsed the 2005 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Kelly 2019; British Council Nigeria, 2012; Denney, 2011; Nigeria Freedom House, 2019). Also Ogunode and Salman (2023), stated that poor implementation of various gender policies on the education of females in Nigeria has accounted for poor representation in every aspect of the universities in Nigeria. The poor implementation of gender policy on admission is responsible for the gender imbalance in terms of admission in the university system in Nigeria. The poor implementation of gender policy on recruitment is responsible for more males among the staff of the universities in Nigerian than the females and the poor implementation of gender policy on the appointment of university managers and administrators gave males the upper hand in the occupation of leadership positions of the universities than the female folks. Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2006); James (2014); Deji (2016) and Kelly (2019), acknowledged that the inability of the various government institutions to implement gender policies in public and private institutions is responsible for gender inequality in most of the public institutions in Nigeria.

Political Influence

Political influence is one of the factors that has given male academics upper hand in university leadership positions in Nigeria. More men are in politics than women and this has influenced their appointment and selection processes in recruitment into university leadership positions. Most male in academics in Nigeria participate in political activities than the female. Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015) opined that politics is traditionally a male domain and all financial, economic, commercial and political negotiations conducted outside the home are by males. Nigerian women have very limited access to decision making process and they have a severe lack of access to and control over financial resources. This effectively reduces women's chances of contesting elections. Many

social norms make it harder for women to participate in politics and occupy leadership positions in Nigeria. In some places, a husband's permission is required for his wife to take part in political activity. Women are also disproportionately burdened with childcare responsibilities. Many political meetings are held at night-time which makes it difficult for women to attend. In some areas, women will not have a bank account and so will struggle to pay registration fees (British Council Nigeria, 2012). Levels of education and formal employment are also lower for women, which have been correlated with lower political participation (Ngara, & Ayabam, 2013); (Mohammed & Zaid, 2014); Dim & Asomah, 2015). However, women's political participation still lags behind their increasing prominence in economic life and civil society (British Council Nigeria, 2012). Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015), observed that a lot of Nigerian women in Nigeria lack effective power or influence, especially in federal government structure. Many of them do not have the necessary skills to present ideas effectively. Lack of awareness and nonpolitical participation has limited some of them.

Few Female Academics
The university system in Nigeria is male dominated and this has given the male academics the opportunities to dominate the leadership positions in most of the universities in Nigeria. There are few female academics in the university system (Ekwukoma, 2018). In terms of staffing in Nigerian university system, NUC (2019), record a total of 73,443 academic staff, comprising 56,063 males and 17,380 females. The non-academic staffing of Universities is presented using the NUC norms of Senior Technical Staff, Senior Administrative Staff (Non-Secretarial), Senior Administrative Staff (Secretarial), Junior Technical Staff, and Junior Non-Technical Staff by University, by Gender, and by Ownership in academic units and non-academic units, as well as overall total of non-academic staff. A total of 152,475 non-academic staff were reported for 2019, comprising 95,997 males and 56,478 females (Nigerian University System Statistical Digest, 2019).The wide gap has reduced the population of the female academics in most of the Nigerian universities.

Low interest in Leadership Positions
Low interest and negative attitude of female academics towards leadership position in higher institutions is poor. Many female academics are not interested in holding academic positions in the universities because of the demands of the positions. Many female academics believe that occupying leadership is demanding along with the numerous workloads to cover. This discouraged most of women from showing interest. Okafor and Akokuwebe (2015), stated that dehumanising treatment of widows, wife-battering and other subjugating tendencies that can eventually make a woman to lose self-confidence added up to this. Such ills keep women 'silent' in the public sphere and also private domain (Aina, 2012). Also the traditional role of the women in carrying out household chores, attend to family issues and social engagement prevents most of them from accepting academic positions in the universities. Kelly (2019), noted that a 2015 study of men and women's attitudes to women in leadership roles showed the persistence of gendered attitudes**.** The study consisted of a quantitative survey of 1,532 men and 504 women across six states, each representing a geopolitical region, and qualitative focus groups featuring a total of 192 participants. While over three quarter of men agreed that women and men would make equally good leaders, sexist attitudes were also prevalent in both the survey and the focus groups. The authors of the study attribute this to a social desirability bias. ActionAid (2013); Ekpe, Eja, and John, (2014); (Okafor and Akokuwebe 2015); Sarkinfada and Rabo (2022), acknowledged that the universal evaluation of culture as superior to nature is the basic reason for the devaluation of women. Women are seen as closer to nature than men and therefore are inferior to men. Women produce children; women are mothers and wives. They do the cooking for men and submit to male authority. They were largely excluded from high status occupations and from position of power.

All these issues discourage female academics from being interested to get appointed into university leadership positions.

Weak Institutions

The federal government has established some agencies to ensure full implementation of gender policies in all public and private institutions but most of these agencies are very weak in carrying out their mandates. (Ogunode and Salman 2023), ascertained that there are institutions established and saddled with the responsibility of implementing gender policies at all levels of public and private institutions in Nigeria. National Gender Policy, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006), asserted that the National Gender Policy puts in place both institutional and operational frameworks that are to ensure that all gender equality imperatives are effectively implemented. The Gender Management System (GMS) with its four pillars enabling environment: GMS structures, GMS Mechanisms and GMS processes was adopted for the management of the gender equality framework. Importantly, the responsibility for gender equality is that of all government agencies, line ministries, state and community apparatuses as well as the civil society and the private sector. However the Ministry of Women's Affairs and its organs (both at the Federal, State, and Local Government levels) have responsibility for the effective coordination of all gender equality and women empowerment institutions, and the implementation of gender equality and women empowerment programmes and activities. The majority of public institutions saddled with the responsibilities of ensuring full implementation of gender policies in private and public institutions like the universities are weak in carrying out their mandate (Ogunode, Ahmed & Yahaya 2021; Sarkinfada, 2020; Nigeria Centenary Country Report on Women 2013; Nigeria's National Gender Policy 2008).

Patriarchal Practice

The patriarchal practice in Nigerian society has also contributed to the poor representation of female academics into Vice-Chancellorship appointments in Nigerian universities. Oluyemi, Undated) viewed patriarchy as a society ruled and dominated by men over women which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and non-partisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to seek for political positions. Ogunode and Salman (2023), noted that patriarchal practice inherent in the Nigerian community has contributed to the low representation of women in universities. This patriarchal practice has also influenced enrolment and admission into schools and other related activities in the universities system. National Gender Policy Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006); Ndiyo (2011); Nakpodia and Urien (2012); Lawan and Muhammed (2014); posited that in Africa including Nigeria, the culture of patriarchy, while not exclusive to these areas has been allowed to infringe very seriously on human rights of women, socialisation of children and development practice through policy. Such norms have increased incidences of violence against women, early marriage, negative traditional practices such as widowhood practices, female genital mutilations, negative sexual behaviours of men against their spouses and so on. Aina (1998); Ogunode (2016); Sarkinfada and Hussaini (2019) and Ogunode and Ndubuisi 2021a), identified culture as a strong weapon playing crucial roles on gender issues and in understanding the predominant gender ideology within Nigerian society. Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of lives. The under representation of women in political participation gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society much of which was obvious from pre-colonial era till date (ActionAid, 2011; ActionAid 2012; Ogunode & Ahmed 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examined factors responsible for gender gap in appointment of Vice-Chancellors in universities in Nigeria. The paper concluded that there is low number of females in the position of Vice- Chancellors in Nigerian universities. The paper identified cultural factors, poor implementation of gender policy on appointment of universities administrators; political influence, few female in the academia, low interest in leadership position and weak institutions as factors that have contributed to low representation of female academics in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors in Nigerian universities. Based on these submissions, the paper recommended that:

1. The government should ensure gender policies are implement in all the universities in Nigeria in term of appointments and selection of academic leaders.
2. Institutions established for ensuring gender equity should be strengthened with legislations to carry out their functions.
3. Government should use social media and other possible medium to enlighten and or challenge all discriminatory gender norms, patriarchal practices, beliefs, early marriage practices and stereotypes that curtail girl education and girl educational attainment in Nigeria
4. Female Academics should be encouraged to apply and contest for appointive and elective (respectively) positions in the Universities.

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