Gender Analysis in National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN):
Implications and Policy Issues in Bridging the Divide

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Abstract: Recent studies on gender have shown that there is a serious gender imbalance in access to higher education and employment in the universities. To explore these issues, this study used National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) as a case study. The study drew upon available data from the only Open University in Nigeria. The study established three findings: (i) Even with its vision of 'democratising' education, gender imbalance existed in student enrolments and staff recruitment (ii) However, the strength of this association varied according to programmes with the disparity strongest in science, technology and mathematics (STM), and in staff recruitment (iii) Moreover, conventional gender explanations especially as regards student enrolment are limited since NOUN unlike conventional universities in Nigeria does not create a ceiling admission and access to its programmes. Why should gender disparities still exist? The conclusion which answered this question summarised the results and considered their broader implications for understanding the role of NOUN in bridging the gender divide in higher education.

Key words:

INTRODUCTION

The promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is the Goal 3 of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in which United Nation members have pledged to meet by the year 2015. Recent studies that attempted to evaluate the progress towards the MDGs pointed out the dismal progress made in bridging the gender divide especially in higher education[37]. It is clear that women all over the world are underrepresented and generally, they face discrimination and marginalisation on the basis of their gender[17]. According to the World Education Report[41], there has been a long-standing imbalance in participation of women in formal education. Onsongo[32] argued that, the consequence of this trend is that the literacy rate of the world’s women (71.2%) is significantly lower than that of men (83.6%). Nearly two-thirds of the worlds illiterate adults are women (565 million), most of whom live in Africa, Asia and Latin America

Most scholars on gender agree that the elimination of gender disparity in education is necessary for the meaningful economic, political and social development of any society. Over the last decade, international concerns on the situation of women in the world has generated and intensified campaigns for more equitable distribution of the world’s resources between men and women[32]. The impact of gender disparity underlies the UNDP statement that ‘for too long, it was assumed that development was a process that lifts all boats, that its benefits trickled down to all income classes- and that it was gender neutral in its impact. Experience teaches otherwise[2].

A UNESCO-Commonwealth Report on women in higher education management shows that ‘with hardly an exception, the global picture is one of men outnumbering women about five to one at middle management and about twenty to one at senior
management level. Women deans and professors are a minority group and women vice-chancellors and presidents are still a rarity.\[25\]. Similarly, an ACU Survey, ‘Still a Single Sex Profession?’ has shown that by 2000, the situation had only improved marginally. It states that: ‘At the middle management level, men outnumbered women at about ten to one. Women vice-chancellors-presidents, deans and professors were still a rarity'.\[24\]. Another survey conducted by Onsongo\[32\] on women’s participation in management in six Kenyan public universities as at July 2002 reached similar conclusion: ‘the fact that fewer women than men are enrolled in universities is one reason why there are few women staff,’ thus reflecting a vicious cycle. A previous report by the World Bank\[41\] on Nigerian universities revealed that women form a minority of university teachers in Nigeria. The report has further shown that:

- female academic staff has stagnated at a level of about 14 percent. Such un-representation produces two negative consequences for the university system. First, it deprives universities of access to some of the country’s best minds for teaching and research. Second, it undercuts the academic performance of women students through the limited provision of female role models who may be more appreciative of the special challenges faced by women on campus.

Olubor\[30\] adding one more twist to this literature argued that despite women increasing participation in the labour market, they are still disadvantaged in the mainstream of economic life. Earlier on, Suda\[39\] demonstrated that women’s limited access to formal education and lower adult literacy rates undermined their capacity to participate in the formal and informal labour market on equal basis with men. Nozawa\[25\] took this position further and reported that with limited access to stable and well paid employment, female participation is often confined to ‘feminine work’, to low-paid less visible jobs in the informal sector and to subsistence agriculture. Women’s work has therefore been jettisoned to that of low status, low pay, and in the hierarchy of economies considered low skilled. These are the pillars on which the performance of women has rested for a long time. Nozawa\[25\] also reported that in most regions of the world, female enrolment in secondary level, technical and vocational education represents less than half of the total. Table 1 shows the gender disparity in student enrolment at both the primary and secondary levels in Nigeria; as would soon be shown, such disparity projects into the tertiary educational level.

This explains why the G8 Summit held in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2006 in its Affirmation entitled ‘Education for Innovative Societies in 21st Century’ noted that:

- we regret that interim targets related to eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education have not been achieved. Greater concerted action by all will be needed to fulfill these key goals by 2015. We affirm our commitments in this regard.

Olubor\[30\], corroborating the above submission argued that the implication for most regions of the world is that fewer girls have the opportunities to participate in technical activities. It is at this level that interest and love for technical activities are built. This may eventually translate into fewer enrolments in technically based courses like engineering. Even among the few girls that opt for vocational courses, they tend to choose fields that are considered more ‘feminine’ and less technical such as secretarial studies, catering etc. Odejide, Akanji and Odekunle\[27\] studies on gender in Nigerian Universities followed this trend of argument. They concluded that women’s access to the Faculty of Technology is hampered by poor preparation at lower levels of education, male dominance of time and space and societal expectations of appropriate work for women.

Studies have shown that tertiary education system in Nigeria is bedevilled with gender inequality in terms of enrolment of students and recruitment of staff. A study by Okebukola\[28\] revealed that of the total population of 526,780 from universities that provided enrolment data, only 178,995 (34%) were female. Another study by Makhubu\[26\] however showed that there are mainstream academic areas in which women excel. These included the humanities, social sciences and the life sciences. The study further noted that the under representation of women in science and technology is a serious bottleneck in an endeavor to build scientific capacities in Africa. Nzewi\[26\] attributed obstacles to women engaging in and pursuing careers in STM to factors of tradition and cultural norms, attitudes and prejudices, religion, poverty and ignorance. For inherent in the socialisation process of societies is a particularly damaging depiction of gender roles as biological rather than social construction.
A study by Akubue[2] has noted that this form of socialisation which leads to a loss of self esteem has a propensity to inspire phobia, diffidence, and lack of interest among girls and women, who tend to believe that some academic disciplines and professional careers are beyond their abilities. This mindset is a powerful force that is contributing to the perpetuation of poverty among Third World women in particular and Third World in general.

This paper does not discuss the overall effect of gender on the higher education system in Nigeria. Instead, it deals with an important, yet novel issue in bridging the gender gap in NOUN. Studies by Olakulehin and Ojo[29], and Kanwar and Taplin[16] have shown that distance education (DE) has the propensity to empower women and enhance their participation and access to decision making process. Equally, the Blueprint for the establishment of NOUN identified not only the need to close the gender divide in Nigeria, but to create opportunities for women to participate actively in higher education:

- Girls and women are important targets in development programmes. One aspect of the education gap in Nigeria is the discrepancy as regards equal opportunities in education for girls and women. It is often reported that both formal and non-formal education programmes at a distance reach substantial numbers of women, including societies where women lack opportunities for participating in conventional forms of education and training. Efforts to tailor programmes particularly towards, women in general, women in purdah, in nomadic communities, disabled/handicapped people, etc. as target groups are bound to increase with open distance learning[8].

The main thrust of this paper is to examine the gender imbalance and disparity in students’ enrolment and employment in Nigeria. The need for equity and the relevance of women’s education in national development in all societies cannot be over-emphasised. The Cairo and Beijing Conferences held in 1994 and 1995 respectively pointed out that education is one of the most critical areas of empowerment for women. Studies conducted showed that among children not attending school, there are twice as many girls than boys, and among the illiterate adults, there are twice as many women than men[39]. This paper conceptualises gender and the role of universities in enhancing gender equality; evaluates the empirical evidence and provides support that NOUN might enhance gender equality in the tertiary education system because of its unique features. From the data, it considers the implications and provides some guidelines for ensuring a gendered change, especially in NOUN.

Gender and the Role of Universities in Bridging the Gender Gap:

The Concept of ‘Gender’: At the beginning of the 20th century, men attained significantly higher levels of education than women. One hundred years later, although remarkable progress has been made in female participation because of growing awareness, the growth in female enrolment is still slow[19]. Kitetu and Sunderland[18] argued that this unprecedented shift in education is particularly pronounced at the tertiary level. Various international conventions have been passed concerning women’s access to education. They include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights where the international covenants in arts. 7-9, 11 & 13 mentioned that through the right to education, human beings are oriented to ‘the full development of human personality and a sense of dignity’; UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education[39], the 1981 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA), and the 2000 World Forum on Education For All, especially the EFA 2015 goal commitment of:

- eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girl’s full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality[42]

Though much progress has been made, it is however ironic and sad, that this is eight years to 2015, the target date, and this goal is far from being realised.

Before attempting to highlight what the term ‘gender’ is, it is pertinent to guard against the fatal error of looking at the situation of women alone but at the conditions of, and relationship between, men and women as well as how these relations are structured along gender lines. The value of gender analysis as noted by Suda[35] in his study of the Kenyan labourmarket is to help in the formulation of appropriate gender responsive policies, programmes and projects which will address the specific needs of the marginalised groups. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo[11],
Gender refers to the social meanings associated with being male or female, including the construction of identities, expectations, behaviour and power relationships that derive from social interaction. Those identities, practices and inequalities are, in turn, embodied in the social roles of women and men, in gender relations and in gender hierarchies (power relations between women and men).

Implicit in the above definition is the notion that such relations are not determined biologically but by the social, political and economic context.

- Gender disparity on the other hand can be defined at two levels. At the one level, it is purely descriptive observation of the different outcomes between males and females. However, to move beyond the descriptive level is to ask what might cause gender disparities reaches into the complex interplay of the possible sources as Filmer, King, and Pritchett[7] argued:

  - Discrimination (the differential treatment of individuals because of their gender), biological differences, individual and societal beliefs and attitudes about appropriate gender-specific roles, and the choices of individuals and households based on all of these factors (and more, such as individual’s own circumstances) all play a role in determining gender disparities. These factors are casually interrelated and it is very difficult to disentangle what are the underlying causes and what are merely proximate indicators or symptoms.

The Role of Universities in Bridging Gender Gap:
The role of education in sustainable development and in the empowerment of individuals and groups to improve the quality of their lives in knowledge or learning societies has been stressed by many scholars[28,30]. When any society is confronted with a problem, it turns to its universities for solution because universities as citadels of learning are the ‘think tank’ of any nation and are relied upon by the government to provide both advice and manpower to manage key organs of society, and industries turn to them to develop new products and efficient personnel who will be capable of managing production units[40].

The World Conference on Higher Education identified higher education as a key function in the enhancement and the participation of women in national development. The Conference recognised various socioeconomic, cultural and political obstacles that continue to impede women’s full access to and an effective integration in higher education. Article 4 of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century is very explicit on its demand for the elimination of gender stereotyping in higher education. It emphasised an increase in female enrolment and the elimination of political and social barriers to women’s effective participation in policy and decision making, both in higher education and the society at large. Beside their traditional roles of generating knowledge through research, and providing leadership in the development of high level human resources through education and training, universities are expected to assume responsibility for the articulation of gender equality and subsequent empowerment of women. This will enhance the participation of women in leadership and the transformation of the society.

Onsongo[32] therefore identified four key areas in which the university may play a role in enhancing gender equality:

- Access: Universities are called upon to develop new regulations or initiatives aimed at increasing the percentage of women students and staff;
- Inclusion: Universities can ensure that the content of teaching, learning materials and language is gender sensitive. They can incorporate gender issues into various disciplines and expand research on gender.
- Promotion: Universities need to promote women to the higher academic and administrative positions which give access to decision making;
- Climate: The university climate has often been described as being ‘chilly’, ‘unfriendly’, ‘non supportive’ for women. Universities can introduce initiatives that create an environment friendly to women employees and students.

It is within the ambit of the above submission that this study evaluates how NOUN has attempted to bridge the gender divide, or otherwise.

An Evaluation of Gender Inequalities in NOUN:
Most discussions about open universities and DE directly evaluate its efficacy in ensuring the EFA goals. Some scholars have suggested that the fundamental difference between open and conventional universities is that of access and equality of opportunities in university education. A number of studies in this regard have maintained that there is...
supportive evidence for links between open universities and equity, equality of opportunities and wider access to education\[3,29,13\]. They argue that the correlation has been stronger now than in the previous decades. They also suggested that DE will reduce cost, inconvenience of education delivery, and ensure the entrenchment of a global culture, thereby widening the catchments scope of beneficiaries of university education and reaching the hitherto unreachable, ensuring that nobody interested in, and capable of having university education, is left out. Access in this context is not restrictive to student enrolment but also to staff recruitment and placement.

In order to test these assertions, we utilised data from NOUN. The Open University Act which subsist in the Law of the Federation of Nigeria Appendix III came into effect on July 22, 1983. After a spell of closure, the University was revitalised and rechristened National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) in 2002. The establishment was against the backdrop of the realisation that distance education has emerged as an increasingly important policy options for educational planners in developing countries\[3\]. The adoption of the distance education mode of instruction delivery shows that it is ‘an educational process in which a significant proportion of the teaching is conducted by “someone” removed in space and time from the learner. The link between that “someone” and the learner is therefore necessarily provided by different means of communication and instruction’\[13\]. With the initial 18 Community Resource Study Centers, NOUN has about 27 Centers, and the Centers are expected to be located in all State Capitals, and as many Local Government Councils as possible.

NOUN has been identified to be crucial to the realisation of a major policy of the present administration in Nigeria, tagged the 20-2020 Presidential Vision which hopes to see Nigeria emerge as one of the world’s top 20 economies by the year 2020. This challenge can only be met if NOUN can provide access and equity for comprehensive national development; enhance EFA, especially to reduce or eliminate illiteracy, poverty and gender discrimination; to provide long-life and life-wide education in order to build a learning and knowledge-based society; to educate the citizens on the use of information and communication technologies (ITCs) to accelerate national and community development and many more. According to the Communiqué of the National Workshop on Distance Education in Nigeria which was held in September 2000 at Abuja, as reported in Jegede\[13\], NOUN has the potential to:

- enhance education as a form of human resource development, and satisfy the exceptionally large demand for education by our huge and rapidly expanding population which is still mainly rural, remote, underrepresented, and marginalized through resources, location, economic and other reasons. Distance education will enable Nigeria to provide access for all and achieve equitable representation by taking the distance out of education.

**Access at NOUN:** UNESCO and other United Nations agencies have identified access as one of the ways of reducing gender inequality in the society. Reviewing the submission from Onsongo\[32\], three reasons have been identified as being germane, and a focus spot for equality of opportunity and access in education:

- equal access for individuals regardless of social circumstances;
- equal chances to take part or share in the system;
- equal educational results: equal gains.

In trying to grapple with the challenges and the role of universities in bridging the gender divide in Nigeria, it is pertinent to understand that universities as citadels of learning, have been recognised as knowledge producing institutions and repositories of knowledge that reflects the best in terms of contemporary knowledge and academic content, and in the production of ‘Philosopher Kings’\[32\]. Given the importance of education, Ibidapao-Obe\[32\] argued that, ‘it is understandable why societies and indeed Nigerians place much premium on university education reflected in an ever increasing number of people demanding access to universities’. Evidence from the National Universities Commission\[23\] shows that the total enrolment in Nigerian Universities has grown by 1,205 percent from 57,542 in 1979 to 750,765 in 2006. Equally, the number of universities and funding has increased remarkably (See Table 2). Ironically, universities are only able to admit about 15-18 percent of more than 1.5 million applicants.

**Admissions:** Admission figures for NOUN for the 2005/2006 session show a difference between the numbers of women and men admitted. However, such data should not concede the fact that admission into
admission is bound to have a far reaching repercussion in programmes which women are enrolled. When we consider the evidence that generally, university students prefer the social sciences as reported by the NUC\[^{22}\], gender disparity against women in admission is bound to replicate itself in women representation in STM.

The picture in NOUN with a general female enrolment of 43.83 percent shows female representation in the School of Science and Technology (SS&T) at 46.6 percent (See Table 4). Compared with earlier studies, the percentage may give a false impression of bridging the gender divide for STM programmes. However, an in-depth analysis of Table 4 shows that more than 77 percent of the female in the SS&T have enrolled for the BSc. Nursing programme, traditionally regarded as a female profession, thereby reinforcing the belief that women are not only underrepresented in STM but have a phobia for traditionally male dominated disciplines.

When we therefore consider the percentage gap between male and female in STM programmes without BSc Nursing (also included in this category for our analysis are BSc (Ed.) Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics) [See Table 5], the 17 percent female enrolment becomes consistent with findings of Okebukola\[^{28}\], and the Lecture Series of the NUCVIHEP, Module 8, 2003 that females are poorly represented in the Science based courses and fair better.

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**Table 1:** Gross Enrolment Ratio in Primary & Secondary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross Enrolment Ratio</th>
<th>Most Recent Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary-Total</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary-Female</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary-Total</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary-Female</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Illiteracy Rates-Total</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Illiteracy Rates-Male</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Illiteracy Rates-Female</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ADB Statistics Pocket Book 2006; Vol. VIII, pp.93-94

**Table 2:** Trend of University Education in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1979</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Universities</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Enrolment</td>
<td>57,542</td>
<td>300,618</td>
<td>750,765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean Annual Funding of Federal Universities

|          | N333,000,000.00 | N8,233,131,535.00 | N53,682,343,757.00 |


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**Table 3** and Figure 1 display gender disparities in student enrolment at NOUN for the 2005/2006 Session. The figure shows that female students comprised 43.8 percent of the total enrolment of 35,952 students. The School of Business and Human Resource Management with 56.6 percent had the highest percentage of female students while the School of Education had the lowest percentage (27%) of female students. The gap however does not appear to be as wide as reported in previous studies, especially, Olubor\[^{30}\], Onsogbo\[^{32}\], and NUC\[^{22}\]. However, when we consider that men still make up the remaining 56.2 percentage, this calls for urgent attention. Using a Chi-square analysis, gender differences in enrolment in programmes at NOUN were found to be significant at greater than the 0.05 level \(\chi^2=2464.71, p<0.05\].

**Curriculum:** As argued above, gender inequality in admission is bound to have a far reaching repercussion...
Staff Recruitment: Like the disparity in student enrolment, it has been argued that female recruitment, training and promotion have been conditioned by the vagaries that deny women active participation in the society. These are the vagaries of culture, attitudes, qualification, situation and institutional barriers[6]. The fact that fewer women than men are enrolled in the universities is one reason why they are fewer women among the staff. A study by Singh[34], and Kanake[35] revealed that women form a minority of staff at the university. At NOUN, female constitute only about 14.2 percent of senior academic staff. Using a Chi-square analysis, these differences (See Table 6) were found to be significant at greater than the 0.05 level [chi-square (df=1) =5.67, p < 0.05].

Equally important, is the fact that, women were found to be missing from senior university management,
Table 5: Students Enrolment in STM Programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Male Number</th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female Number</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSc.(Ed) Mathematics</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc.(Ed) Physics</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc.(Ed) Chemistry</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc. Computer Science</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc. Computer Technology</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc. Mathematics</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSc. Mathematics/Computer Science</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGD Digital Communication</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGD Mobile (Wireless) Comm. Technology</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGD Information Technology</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGD Information Technology with Internet Application</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3092</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
<td><strong>634</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>3726</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

x² (df=10) =76.63, p<.05

Table 6: Distribution of Senior Academic by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Professors*</th>
<th>Program Leaders*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33 (17.1%)</td>
<td>160 (82.9%)</td>
<td>193 (76.28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
<td>57 (85%)</td>
<td>60 (73.72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>36 (14.2%)</td>
<td>217 (85.8%)</td>
<td>253 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Senior academic included in this table include both fulltime and part-time

x² (df=1) =5.67, p<.05

As confirmed in the distribution of Management Staff (See Table 7). Consistent with these findings, the data showed that only 20 percent of female staff are in the management cadre. The differences in the functional distribution of University Management Staff by gender (See Table 8) were also statistically significant (chisquare (df=2) =38.36, p< 0.05).

Table 7 and 8 also reveal that women do not occupy positions in NOUN that would enable them influence the policies and decisions of the institution, at either departmental or institutional level. This is consistent with studies by Onsogbo[32], Kanaké[15], and the ACU Survey, as reported in Singh[34]. The latter specifically noted that, ‘at the middle management level men outnumbered women at about ten to one. Women vice-chancellors/presidents, deans and professors were still a rarity’.

The factors that deprive women the opportunity to occupy management positions and hence participate in decision making include discriminatory appointment, promotion criteria, lack of opportunities for further training, resistance from men, hostile work environment, sexual harassment and sex role stereotyping[32]. Other studies have identified interviews and employment criteria as accentuating the gender divide. Gachukia[10] and Manyas[21] extrapolating further argued that the composition of interview panels, usually male dominated is a formal barrier to women’s participation. Similarly, Onsogbo[32] has shown that job advertisements for positions of senior university academic and management contain elaborate description of the qualifications required, work experience and publications. This coupled with the fact that fewer women are PhD holders make them to be concentrated
Table 7: Distribution of Management Staff by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bursar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deans</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Registrars</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Internal Auditor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Centre Managers*</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Members</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Acting directors, heads and overseers are also included.

Fig. 1: Distribution of Students in School/Center by Gender.
Table 8: Functional Distribution of Management Staff by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head Quarters Management Staff*</th>
<th>Study Centre Managers</th>
<th>Council Members*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male (35.8%)</td>
<td>19 (35.8%)</td>
<td>16 (30.2%)</td>
<td>53 (72.60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (30%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>11 (55%)</td>
<td>20 (27.40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (32.2%)</td>
<td>25 (32.2%)</td>
<td>27 (37%)</td>
<td>73 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*There is likely to be an error in estimation since few members of HQs Management Staff are also members of the University Council.

\[ x^2 (df=1) = 38.36, p<.05 \]

in the junior ranks of course coordinators (lecturers) and below.

**Conclusion:** While the study has by no means been an exhaustive exploration of all gender differences in NOUN, it is a trail blazer considering the fact that NOUN is a young institution, and it is clear that women are underrepresented in enrolment especially in the core STM programmes at NOUN, are somewhat more likely not to occupy management positions and hence participate in decision making. A cursory look at the figures indicates that a marginal and negligible number of female are senior academic. This explains why no female is heading an academic unit such as a School, Centre or a Directorate.

Second, available evidence suggested that low female interest in science, vocational and technical education at the primary, and especially the secondary level translates in low female participation in STM at NOUN. This may also be attributed to few female mentors and role models who would guide women in the choice of STM programmes. This to a greater extent explains why few women are interested in STM programmes even when the University has created enabling entrance criteria for all its programmes.

In conclusion, this study has shown that there is still a great divide in gender even at NOUN which has a mandate to bridge this gulf. From the analysis, it is obvious, that there is, there was and there will continue to be (if concerted efforts are not made to curb this menace) a great and worrisome disparity in enrolment and employment of females in Nigerian Universities. There is need for all stakeholders especially the government and the universities to evolve gender sensitisation programmes. Luckily, parents’ perception of the education of their daughters is gradually changing as more parents now understand the value of educating the female child, though majority of the populace who are rural dwellers are yet to get the drift.

**Recommendations:** The NOUN being open and distance learning institution has a very important role to play in bridging the gender divide. As argued by Trevidi,[36]

- women have constraints of time, space, resources and socioeconomic disabilities. DE can help them with its outreach to their homes. It enables them to learn at their own pace and take up vocation and skills for economic and individual development. It gives them a second chance to step into the main systems of education, including higher education, enabling them at the same time to earn and learn as well as to fulfilling family responsibilities.

Evidence however points to a disjunctive relationship between female enrolment in primary/secondary education and female students’ participation in the university, especially in STM. Therefore, more efforts should be made in removing these disjunctions at the pre-university level, or through NOUN access programmes that enable students remedy deficiencies in ordinary level subjects.

There is also need for the university to put in place a gender mainstreaming framework. This is a process of assessing the implication for women and men for any planned action like legislation, formulation and implementation of policies and programmes in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns or experiences, an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes, in all political and social spheres.[39]

Also recommended, since NOUN has as one of its mandate the enhancement of equality, equity and access to higher education, it must be guided by the country’s Affirmative Action. This anti-discriminatory clause (Section 42) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria forbids that a citizen be discriminated against on the grounds of belonging to a
particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion. This clause if adhered to, will help bridge the gender divide in NOUN.

There is equally need to enhance women’s participation in male dominated subjects, especially STM programmes. This includes providing scholarships and other incentives and support (such as zero interest rate loans) to women. It could also be enhanced by organizing seminars or career counseling, and inviting women students to research organizations to expose them to career possibilities in sciences.

Lastly, NOUN should take the recommendation of the Association of African Universities by establishing gender institutes/centers. By collaborating with private organisations, NOUN can come up with gender programmes at the diploma and the post graduate levels, because such programmes can go a long way in enhancing gender equality in the university.

It is hoped that these recommendations would apply mutatis mutandis to all universities and higher institutions of learning desirous of enhancing the EFA goals, and specifically in bridging the gender divide.

REFERENCES


