

Sensitizing the female in University Admission in South-South Geopolitical Zone for Assurance of Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Dr. Don Omoike

Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education, Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria
E-mail: dononode@hotmail.com

Abstract: *There has been a growing belief that the rate of admission of candidates into universities in Nigeria through the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has been tilted in favour of the males. This apparent anomaly has resulted in the production of fewer female graduates especially in universities in Nigeria. As a result, the needed female manpower is not sufficiently available in almost all production industries that could provide the needed change in the political and economic spheres for a sustainable development in Nigeria. This is the thrust of this paper which examined the admission rates of females from the south-south zone into universities in Nigeria. Data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistics. It was found that the rate of female admission into universities from the south-south has been increasing but has remained comparatively low. Strategies were proffered to deliberately favour comparative increase in the rate of admission of females into universities in Nigeria to ensure adequate representation of female graduates in the professions and the production sector.*

Keywords: *gender access, gender equity, university admission, university education, sustainable development*

INTRODUCTION

Access to university education in Nigeria has been on the increase with the introduction of full decentralization of higher education at the entrance of the 21st century. The Federal Government of Nigeria brought in private investors into higher education resulting in the establishment of more private universities in Nigeria which has made the total number of universities in Nigeria to be over ninety. Globally, higher education is being aligned with the wider demands of economic development, sustainable development and increased modernization. Widening participation in higher education has become a policy thrust and a priority of recent governments (civilian) in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Unfortunately, however, there seems not to be comparative increase in enrolment rate of females as for the males over the years. This invariably could account for the dearth of high level female manpower in the professions and the production sector of the economy of Nigeria. Research reports such as that of Eribo (1996) had shown a more policy attention to inclusivity and wider participation initiatives that have led to a more state interventionist approach to education at all levels in Nigeria.

According to World Bank (2002) estimates, by 2015 there will be 97 million students enrolled in higher education and half of these will be in the developing countries. It is suspected that this will bring more inclusive policies and practices to bring under-represented groups into the academy. The introduction of Universal Basic Education (UBE) has helped to engender nearly maximum female participation of education at the primary and junior secondary school levels. The quota system policy operated in tertiary education through the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has equally helped to introduce ethnic balancing and equity in university education in Nigeria and in job placement at the public sector. Governments have also established policy measures even in the National Policy on Education on quota allocation in university admission between the arts and sciences {Federal Ministry of Education (FME), 2004}.

However, no corresponding policies or enactments or even pronouncements from governments have been made and consciously pursued with regard to female involvement in University Education in Nigeria. According to Adeyemi

and Akpotu (2004), the National Policy on Education (NPE) does not have provisions for priority focus of female education in universities in Nigeria. This inattention has resulted in low production of female graduates that are plowed into the productive and service sectors of the economy in Nigeria.

It has been suspected that sustainable development has become a mirage in Nigeria because of the apparent neglect of this important area in the education sector. The south-south geopolitical zone in Nigeria has become very volatile in recent time. The crises that have engulfed the region have given rise to speculations as to whether the university education provided in this zone and in Nigeria in general has provided this consciousness and whether a greater percentage of female admission and graduation from universities may not change or reduce the seemingly highly volatile zone that is believed to produce the major economic resource (crude oil) that is sustaining the whole of Nigeria. It is possible to ask what efforts have therefore been made to ensure that females have equitable access to university education given the fact that women have always been more than men in Nigeria's population censuses since independence. How can gender sensitization be assured to ensure that females have comparative advantage in university admission in Nigeria? To achieve this purpose in this research, it was necessary to find out the extent to females from the south-south geopolitical zone are admitted into universities in Nigeria and thus the following two research questions were asked and answered:

- (1) What is the level of university admission in the south-south geopolitical zone?
- (2) What is the level of admission of females from the south-south geopolitical zone into universities in Nigeria?

REVIEW of LITERATURE

The development of equity in access to university education worldwide has been in focus especially in developing countries such as Nigeria. This concern has arisen because there is a complex process that takes place in education with regard to its gender dynamic. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) has been emphasized to indicate the extent to which males and females are equally present at different levels in the education system. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) (1998) while reporting on the existence of gender gaps in American schools emphasized the need to shift focus on girls education from issues bordering on quality to equity. The association believes that equitable education appropriately addresses the needs of males and females rather than assuming that those needs are identical.

Regardless of the specific causes of gender gaps, schools have a commission to ensure that all students can fully participate in and experience educational success. Morley (2005) had reported that there is gender disparity in university education in African countries and there is reluctance especially in Nigeria and Tanzania to remedy the under-representation of women in higher education through quota programmes. It also reported that South-Africa is tackling the problem through the development of Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)

The difficulty in ensuring gender equity in education has been traced to a number of discriminatory practices such as excluding women from career development opportunities, prejudice against women-particularly mothers, gender insensitive pedagogical processes, sexual harassment and gender violence, prejudice about women's academic abilities and widespread male domination of knowledge. Adeyemi and Apkotu (2004) had found the highest proportion of female enrolment (42.13) to come from the Faculty of Education followed by the Faculty of Arts (36.2%) while the lowest percentages were obtained in the Faculties of Engineering, Technology and Environmental Design in universities in Nigeria. It concludes that barriers to women's entry into non-traditional subject areas include poor careers advice, lack of role models, negative attitudes from families, fear of mathematics and fear of being in a minority.

Women access to schooling in general and higher education in particular is far from equal to men. The AAUW has affirmed that official statistics for enrolment tend to under-estimate the dimension of this problem. Many benefits are believed to accrue to investment in female education. From the social dimension, these include lower fertility rates, improved children and women's health, greater life expectancy for women and men, and higher schooling attainment by new generations (UNESCO, 1998). With regard to individual improvements, they include older age of

marriage, reduced teen pregnancy, greater participation and productivity into the labour force and greater sense of independence in economic and political decisions.

METHOD of STUDY

This study is descriptive and uses the “ex-post-facto” because of the reliance on the admissions already carried out by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). The data were collected from JAMB publications and were not subjected to any form of manipulation. The focus of this study was the university admissions carried out by JAMB between 2000 and 2004. Data from a five year range was seen to be adequate and were the most recent data approved and made public by JAMB. The data collected from JAMB records were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics especially percentages. The results are presented in the tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 clearly shows that there has been a steady increase in admissions into universities from the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria between 2000 and 2004. From 12,335 in 2000 it rose to 34,518 in 2004. A variation in the trend was noticed in 2001 when 22,302 candidates were admitted. The males continued to dominate in admission from 2001-2004. The dominance was prominent in all the six states with the only exception being in 2002 admission for Akwa-Ibom with 50.2% for females as against 49.8% for males.

Of all the states in the zone, only Delta and Rivers consistently had female enrolment rate of slightly above 40% for the five year period under study (2000-2004). But in the last year under study (2004), all the states with the exception of Bayelsa had above 40% female admission. Edo State had slightly above 40% enrolment in 2003. The zone had above 40% female admission in 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2004.

Table 2 shows the national admission into all universities and the admission from the six states in the zone combined. All the years had a range of between 24.6% and 29.7% of the total university admission for the period under study. While it was lowest in 2001 (24.6), it rose to the highest of 29.7 in 2002 while it was 28.2% in 2004. It is interesting to note that the south-south zone that makes up about 16% of the states in Nigeria controls more than one-quarter of the admissions into universities in Nigeria through JAMB.

DISCUSSION

The findings have revealed the consistently lower rate of admission of females in south-south geopolitical zone of the country. This is in line with the earlier findings of Adeyemi and Akpotu (2004) that even though there has been increase in the level of admission of females in higher education, there has also been a corresponding lower enrolment than males in universities. It also agrees with the observation of Morley (1997) that there is need to strategize and create equality in higher education between males and females.

The perpetual disadvantaged position of female in South-South in admission into universities in Nigeria do reflect the situation persisting in the whole country on issues relating to the education of women in higher education. UNESCO (1998) had expressed a great concern over the absence of gender dimension in higher education in general and in higher education curriculum in particular. There seems to be no strong alignment between policy discourses and organizational practices. This gap in policy implementation is not exclusive of higher education in Nigeria because she has consistently been party to policy decisions at global conferences in general sensitization in higher education in particular and all levels of the education system in general.

The findings also show that the much expected 50-50 enrolment between males and females is far from being achieved. The existing gender inequality may seem to be a function of factors beyond the universities in Nigeria irrespective of the phenomenal increase in the number of universities. This may be a result of high levels of female dropout and poor attendance at the secondary level of education. It can also be attributed to the several factors that affect girls' education at the lower levels of the education system such as cultural issues, early marriages, poverty, parents' negative attitude to girls' education, absence of role models, among others.

Table 1. University male and female Admission rates in South-South Geo-political zone 2000-2004

States		2000			2001			2002			2003			2004		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
AKWA-IBOM	N	808	636	1444	1623	1031	2654	1964	1987	3951	21654	1964	4128	4324	3812	8136
	%	55.9	44.1		61.2	38.8		49.8	50.2		52.4	47.6		53.8	46.2	
BAYELSA	N	418	253	671	1587	862	2445	667	347	1014	2491	1481	3972	2560	1631	4191
	%	62.3	37.7		64.7	35.3		67.8	34.2		62.7	37.2		61.1	38.9	
CROSS-RIVER	N	343	218	561	734	373	1107	813	533	1346	1173	779	1952	1411	1001	2412
	%	61.1	38.9		66.3	33.7		60.4	39.6		60.1	39.9		58.5	41.9	
DELTA	N	2494	1763	4217	3859	2742	6601	2289	1598	3887	3930	2787	6717	5214	4300	9514
	%	58.2	41.8		58.5	41.5		58.9	41.1		58.5	41.5		54.8	45.2	
EDO	N	2118	1397	3515	2149	1344	3493	1861	1135	2996	3941	2724	6665	3824	2806	6630
	%	60.3	39.7		61.5	38.5		62.1	37.9		59.1	40.9		57.7	42.3	
RIVERS	N	1105	822	1927	3412	2590	6002	1079	813	1892	3884	3148	7032	2719	2186	4905
	%	57.3	42.7		56.5	43.2		57	43		55.2	44.8		55.4	44.6	
TOTAL	N	7846	5089	12335	13364	8938	22302	8673	6413	15086	17583	12883	30466	18782	15736	34518
	%	58.7	41.3	100	61.5	38.5	100	57.5	42.5	100	100	42.3	100	54.4	45.6	100

Key: N = Number of admission; % = percentage
M = Male
F =Female
T =Total

Table 2. Percentage admission rate of South-South Zone in Nigeria 2000-2004

		2000			2001			2002			2003			2004		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
South-	N	7246	5089	12335	13364	8938	22302	8673	6413	15086	17583	12883	30466	18782	15736	34518
South	%	27.2	26.6	26.9	24.3	21.7	24.6	27.2	32.2	29.7	29.6	28.6	29.1	26.9	29.5	28.2
Zone																
National	N	26665	19101	45766	54972	35797	90769	31942	19903	51845	59742	45415	105157	69715	52777	122492
	%			100			100			100			100			100

Key: N = Number of admission; % = percentage
M = Male
F =Female
T =Total

CONCLUSION

Female access and equality in university education has not been given enough sensitization for meaningful contribution to sustainable development in Nigeria. Admission into higher education has continued to be tilted in favour of males as the females have always had comparatively less opportunities for admission into universities in south-south geopolitical zone in particular and Nigeria in general. Sustainable development is not assured in the absence of proper articulation and implementation of guidelines for female education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Career guidance and sensitization should start at lower levels education. This could be built up right from primary school. Any career guidance after secondary education may not be of much benefit as students would already have selected subjects and made up their minds to not pursue higher education. The introduction of special scholarship for females should be a matter of policy both at the federal and state levels. This should be well publicized for the bright female students from poor background to be aware of such opportunity.

There should be a policy shift from the present admission criteria being operated in Nigeria. The introduction of quota should be extended to gender. If it is working for the educationally disadvantaged states and local governments, it will also be effective in redressing the imbalance in male and female ratio in university admission. The federal government should immediately embark on reviewing the National Policy on Education to create a section on gender education to spell out the modalities of expanding access and equity for female education in higher education especially at the university level.

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