
DEBATING GENDER EQUITY IN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper will examine the issue of debates sounding gender equity in access to higher education specifically focused on female enrolment in university education in Nigeria, with specific attention to northern Nigeria region with one of the universities in the north as a case. While it was clearly stated in the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria that stipulated equal educational opportunities in respect of gender, currently, there is unequal enrolment between boys and girls in access to universities in the location where the study under was selected and its catchment areas compared with the other parts of the country. To gain an insight into this matter of contention, this case study employed a semi-structured in-depth interview to seek the views of the policymakers' and policy implementers' regarding the issues surrounding this impediment challenge. Furthermore, the paper employed document analyses to review policy documents and statistics of applicants wishing to secure admission into Nigerian universities. This study has shown that there are many problems attributed to this phenomenon including, among others, social upbringing, cultural orientation and social-economic status. In response, the study strongly recommends strategies to encourage female participation including compulsory female education in Nigeria at the basic level to improve their access to university education.

Keywords: Equity, Gender, Access, university, participation, Northern Nigeria.

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Introduction

The need to investigate the implementation of equity in access to education is now generally accepted as one of the tools of educational reforms (Biodun, 2000). Much of the development of education in the modern era has been brought about in the name of equity in access to education. This slogan has been used to justify the expansion of accessibility, facilities and the expenditure in education in a very imaginable way (Flaming, 1974 as cited in Imam, 2012). Even though the equity in access to education argument is generally recognised as one of the main justifications to sustain public education, national unity and development, this concept is far from having a single accepted definition (OECD, 2009). Its meaning has developed over the years, thanks to the contribution of distinguished philosophers, sociologists and economists such as Gupta and Verhoeven (2001), Jung and Thorbecke (2003), Grimm (2005), Hanushek (2009) who have given equity a sense of understanding within the debate of its perception. For this reason, it is common to refer to the different concepts when talking about it. Traditionally, it has been understood as the absence of legal barriers in the full access to education, the equal distribution opportunities among societies within a certain area (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson & Macpartland, 1966).

In the Nigerian context, it is recalled that the equal educational objective contained in the Constitution is of the philosophy to provide educational opportunities at all levels to all citizens (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1981). Consequently, as have been pointed out earlier in the introduction, the higher education gap between Northern and Southern Nigeria traced out the educational inequality in Nigeria. This has given rise to the idea of promoting equity in access to education in the country (Aderounmu & Ehiametalor, 1985; Adeyemi, 2001). According to Kosemani (1995), the education disparities between the northern and southern zones of Nigeria, are evident in terms of the universities, the teaching and learning resources, as well as the participation of males and females in education. This also has resulted in the formulation of the policy on equity in access to education. There are also disparities between urban and rural schools and between education institutions owned and controlled by the Federal Government and those owned and controlled by the states and private agencies (Okobia, 2002).

The Problem

Inequalities in education have also been a persistent constraint on the EFA process. In 2009, the EFA Global Monitoring Reports stated that “Progress towards the EFA goals is being undermined by a failure of governments to tackle persistent inequalities” based on income, gender, location and ethnicity, language, and so forth. (UNESCO, 2004, pp.4, 7, & 29). In the subsequent year, the report indicated that “Governments are failing to address the root causes of marginalization in education” (UNESCO, 2012, p.22) and showed how the mutually reinforcing layers of disadvantages create extreme and persistent deprivation that undermines equal opportunities in education (p.137). In all such circumstances, different types of barriers emerge as central factors for the limited enjoyment of the right to education of these various population groups. Understanding these different obstacles and their inter-relations is a permanent challenge for developing effective education policies to ensure non-discrimination and equal opportunities in education.

A statement by the Joint Expert Group UNESCO (CR) and ECOSOC (CESCR) on the Monitoring of the Right to Education (2008) highlighted that in overcoming inequalities and eliminating disparities in education, emphasis should be placed on the inclusive dimensions of the right to education, which does not admit any discrimination or exclusion. The work of human rights treaty bodies over the last years have indicated areas of action at national and international levels to ensure equity in access to education (United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, 2013). As described by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education in his Report on the Promotion of equity in access to education (April, 2011), equal opportunities in education based on a human rights framework can be promoted in many ways, which include policy implementation, and that is what this research principally seeks to do.

Contextually, the educational access objective contained in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as cited earlier is aimed at “equal and adequate” educational opportunities for all citizens. However, despite the goal of equalising the educational opportunity between the advantaged in the south and the disadvantaged in the north, the gap between the high demand for access to higher education continues to pose a serious problem, especially in the north. These disparities on equity in access

to education between Northern and Southern zones are evident in terms of university distribution, and enrolment rates (Bakare, 2012; Dada, 2004; FCC, 1994; Okoli, 2007)

The Case Study

As indicated earlier, this research focuses on the issue of equity with the specific case of female participation in access to university education. The case study, according to Gall, Gall and Borg (2005), has some distinctive characteristics. A phenomenon is studied by focusing on one particular case, the study is in-depth, the phenomenon is studied in its context, and there is a representation of both the etic and the emic perspectives (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Furthermore, Creswell (2007) defined a case study as research that involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system in a defined time frame, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes (p, 73).

The University and its Catchment area as Context Background

The university is one of the four universities established by the Federal Government of Nigeria in September 1975, at which time three university colleges (now full-fledged universities) were established. The university with an enrolment debut of ninety-three undergraduate students for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Arts/Science in Education and Bachelor of Science; and with academic staff strength of thirty-three. States considered being the immediate Catchment areas of the university includes Sokoto state itself, Kebbi state, and Zamfara state and were all located in the north-western part of Nigeria (Salihu, M. J., & Jamil, H. (2015).

Research Questions (RQs)

RQ1: To investigate the state of participation of female in relation to access to university education access to university education

RQ1.1 To explore the policymakers' and policy implementers' views on alternative policy practices to improve female participation in access to university education

Research Design

This investigation, being a social science study, is primarily concerned with obtaining information on a particular realm. Thus, the qualitative approach is employed owing to its ability to allow the researcher to make an in-depth inquiry of social situations, events or interaction (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2004; Mullen, 2005). The choice of the qualitative approach in investigating this research is hinged on the unimpeachable fact that as far as the topic of the research is concerned, it has quite an advantage over its twin approach – the quantitative. Qualitative research is concerned with the manner of occurrence of particular events, how people understand the values aligned, and to view the phenomenon in their actual happenings (Salihu, 2017, Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2004).

Research Instrument and Informant of the Study

The instruments selected for the collection of data for this research investigation are interview protocols and document analysis methods. This is in the conformation of Eugene's (2009) observation that in qualitative research almost all likely sources of information, data and ideas constitute people and documents.

The participants were selected from the University, Universities Commission and the Admission Body. The university commission is an autonomous agency under the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) that are charged with the care of university education in the country. The rationale behind its establishment was for the orderly development of university education in Nigeria, expansion of access, maintenance of high standards, and assurance of adequate funding (Uvah, 2005). The admission body was founded by the federal government as the central placement examination body in 1978 (Nwadiani & Igineweka, 2005). It has been suggested that a set of eight – ten samples is size enough to support data collection in qualitative research (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). In this study, twelve participants were purposively selected consist of policymakers and policy implementers from the trio organizationsinvolved in the study.

Authenticity of the findings

Trustworthiness is one of the basic requirements for the conduct of research is for the researcher to establish trustworthiness in the mind of the research audience; the researcher has to find ways of convincing audience that the research and its findings are worth the attention which they seek to be given. Lincoln and Guba (1985) seek to answer the question of "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an enquiry are worth paying attention to". Thus, the researcher strived by all legal means (without intimidation) and obtained or earned the trust of the research audience.

Credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002; Macnee & McCabe, 2008). In this study, several stages established credibility. Which include a pilot test, Secondly, all data were rated by an experienced expert in qualitative research and higher education studies in correspondents with the research objectives and questions, among other credible techniques. Dependability According to Bitsch (2005), dependability refers to "the stability of findings over time" (p. 86). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300) stated "inquiry audit" is one measure which might enhance the dependability of qualitative research. In this research, the consistency of data was achieved as the steps of the research had verified through using an audit trail, a code-recode strategy, stepwise replication, and the examination of items such as raw data, data reduction products, and process notes (Ary, *et al.*, 2010; Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Hoepfl, 1997; Krefting, 1991; Schwandt, *et al.*, 2007).

Data Analysis Procedures

For this paper, there was an evolved coding system, which was used to regularise the analysis of all the data collected. This was done to conform to Walcott's (1994) postulation that there should be a search for "patterned regularities in the data."

According to Coffey and Atkinson (1966, p. 27) “codes represent the decisive link between the original data, that is the textual material such as interview transcripts, observation notes or fields notes on the one hand, and the researcher’s theoretical concepts on the other.” As coding is the distinguishing line between the actual data obtained in the field and the way the researcher precepts the situation, then it behoves this researcher to adopt it as an instrument for achieving workability.

Document analysis

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires data to be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007). Documents contain text (words) and images that have been recorded without a researcher’s intervention. Atkinson and Coffey (1997) referred to documents as “social facts,” which are produced, shared, and used in socially organised ways (p. 47). Document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a mean of triangulation “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (Bowen, 2009, p. 36). The qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple sources of evidence (at least two); that is, to seek convergence and corroboration by different data sources and methods (Yin, 1994). Bogdan and Biklen (2007), divided documents in educational research into three basic categories: personal documents, official documents, and popular culture. In this study, documents were selected using two criteria. First, documents were selected by considering their relevance to the study. Second, documents were selected by giving priority to recent documents instead of old ones.

Data Analysis

Gender Participation

The 1981 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the 1996 Federal Character Policy on equity of access to higher education and 2004 revised Nigeria National Policy on Education guaranteed educational equity for all citizens. Fundamentally, the policies were intended to bridge the educational gap between the two regions of the country in respect of gender or socio-economic background and to ensure the uniformity of policy across the federation of Nigeria. However, one of the problems faced is gender equity about access to university education in Nigeria, the alignment of female participation, especially in Sokoto state and its catchment areas, which is the context of this study. Most of the respondents from the university observed gender imbalance on participation, in terms of access to university education. When the researcher asked one of the participants about the present situation of the participation scenario, he complained:

Our worries now are on gender participation, the policy equality is meant for everybody but if you compare with other parts of the country, I can tell you that we are lagging far behind, here in Sokoto. Although if you look at it as per what is obtainable now than before, we have some little improvement in female education, but not worth mentioning. (P1-U-I)

Looking at it from its historical perspective and even from what is happening currently in some places, there are people here in Sokoto and in many other parts of Northern Nigeria who remove their daughters from the secondary schools to marry them off, believing that there is no future for their daughters to go into Western education. This is in line with the data document “University Enrolment Statistics,” indicating that there is little or no improvement in recent years in the region of Sokoto when compared with the situation one decade ago when over 85% of the applicants to universities were male candidates. However, if one looks at it from the perspective of the other parts of the country, progress is scarcely seen at play. This revelation by the participants is supported by the document “Application Statistics by State of Origin and Gender” obtained from the admission body. The charts in Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3 show that the numbers of male and female applicants to enter university education across the states of Nigeria.

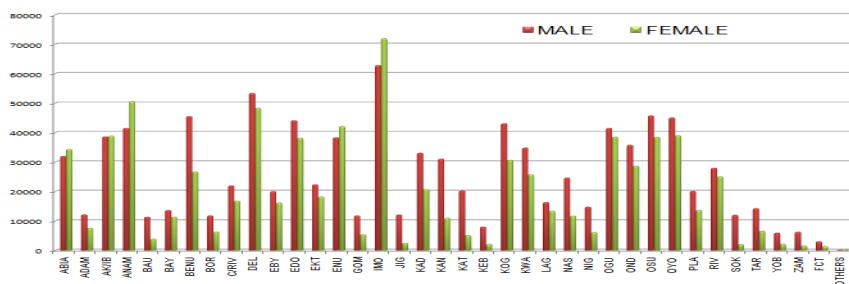


Figure 1. Application statistics for 2012, by the state of origin and gender. Taken and adapted from Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, 2015

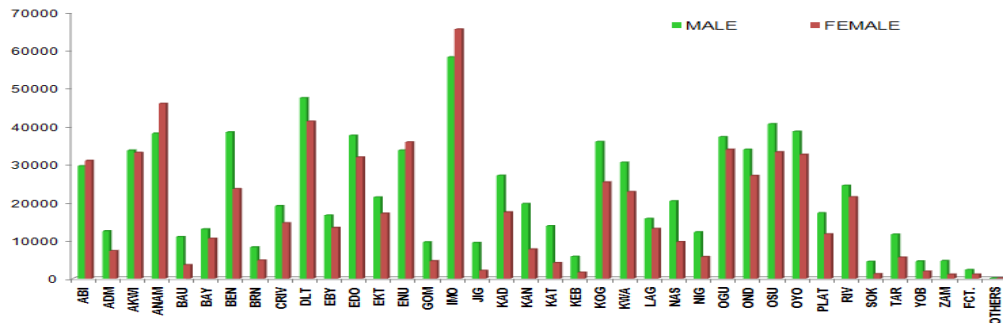


Figure 2. Application statistics for 2013, by the state of origin and gender. Taken and adapted from Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, 2015

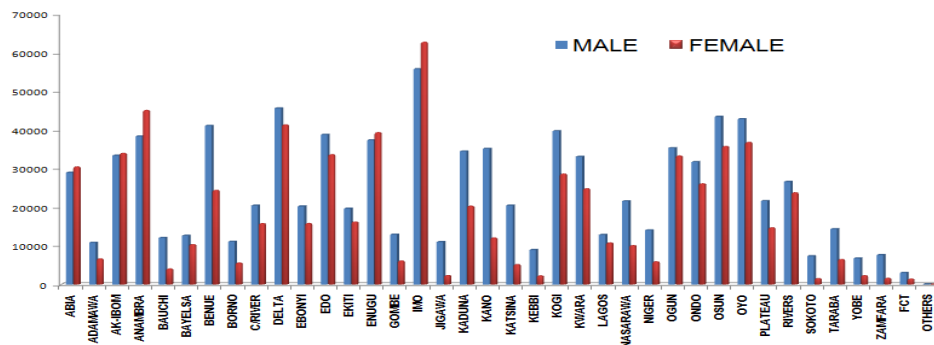


Figure 3. Application statistics for 2014, by the state of origin and gender. Taken and adapted from Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, 2015

Data from the three figures show that the number of applicants by state and gender for three academic sessions 2012/2013, 2013/2014, and 2014/2015. The figures show that some states have more girls than boys, while in some others, the number of girls did not even reach 30% of the total applicants.

Consequently, the researcher interviewed the officers or participants at the university commission and the admission body, who directly oversee the implementation of admission policies and to ensure equitable representation from all genders in the country. Findings showed that the university commission encourages a percentage of gender policy that reflects the enrolment or admissions of students into the university system. Thus, the universities could be expected to also emphasise and encourage those states that are lacking behind, in terms of the gender imbalance of access to universities.

One of the participants specifically assured:

But I can tell you, the issue is not about policy. The issue lies within the culture that we find today the Northern Universities find themselves in. The culture has serious effects on the gender issues that today Northern Nigerian states are facing. (P1-U-I)

Lamenting the alarming problem of gender participation in Northern Nigeria, particularly in Sokoto region, another interviewee cited:

For example, take religion as an example, many families decide that; it's like a kind of casts for their daughters to even pass beyond primary school, it's like exposing her to kind of bad things within the society, so they limit their daughters' participation in education. (P2- AB-I)

However, this issue of gender imbalance in the northern part of Nigeria is associated with so many problems, which include the social upbringing and cultural orientation, which will be fully discussed in the next sections, regarding the research data.

Social Upbringing

From the findings of the study, society's social upbringing is largely associated with the gender imbalance in access to university education. From the beginning, the cultural upbringing of the people in the Northern Nigeria, especially in the way Muslim families provide for their children, especially to the girls, really hampers their girls' development in education. A typical example can be observed at home when mothers discriminate between their sons and daughters. Daughters are always asked to perform one or two domestic chores, whereas the sons are being pampered with convenience with very little sense of responsibility. These practices are not healthy to society; they would widen the gap of equity between genders. A lot of families are still not aware and show little understanding of the importance and the value of equal education for both, the male and female children. One of the interviewees from the university commented:

It is sad when you look at female participation on access to university education in Sokoto State and this has begun right from primary school when it comes to sending the children outside the school system, outside the primary domain where there exist

trust interaction between the parents and the children, they feel that the girl child is very insecure when the girl child leaves the house for any school outside her community. And so, they try to overprotect the girl to the extent that she even begins to feel she has no potentials beyond her immediate environment. (P2-U-I)

Another interviewee from the university commission stated:

Yes, we are aware of that problem, but this are issues that are far beyond the policy and its implementation, these issues are more of cultural beliefs that some parents feel why their daughters should go to university. (P2- UC-I)

In this regard, another participant at the admission body clearly explained:

We are worried that northern Nigeria is far behind on girls' education and this is disturbing because you cannot justify equity in access to education while gender participation is far imbalanced, ... and these issues are so much attached to culture and perception... so, that is why I see them as sensitive things that cannot be aggressively resolved. (P3- AB).

Culturally, typical parents in the north prefer to send their boys to as far as South-South Nigeria, however, they do not have any options for their girls. A daughter will not be allowed to go anywhere but stay at home with her parents. Once she stays, she will not get better competition in her environment. She will have to continue to work more (double) than what she used to do because she will be home and the expectations on her are very high. That has a great effect on the psychology of her development. She continues to be told that she has to limit her thinking, as she will be kept as such by her family who imposes such values on her. Consequently, self-doubt and deep insecurity will start to flourish at the expense of personal growth and development.

Cultural Orientation

The discussion and the responses of the interviewees also revealed their belief that the orientation of a common Northerner as another contributing factor in reinforcing to the gender imbalance in the access to education. Measures to tackle this issue is welcomed as a good alternative towards achieving equity in access to university education in Nigeria. One of the participants argued;

We have serious challenges. Unless we have re-orientated our families, the communalities or community's elders, religious elders about this development, honestly speaking our gender issues will remain imbalanced. (P3- UC-I)

By taking into account the effort in encouraging women participants as a recommendation for improvement towards achieving equity in access to university education in Nigeria, one of the participants emphasised that our society's elders have great roles to play in the issue, as many a times the elders do not show encouraging manners while dealing with the gender issue.

Even among our elders today, once they see a lady as a leader of an organization going to see the traditional leader (emirs), they will be looking at amazement "Who is

this one again?” they will begin to criticise her, asking “Who is her father?” “Why is she sitting on the same chair with the Sultan of Sokoto?” whereas if it’s someone from the South-South, nobody (traditional leaders) will make any negative comments because she is a southerner. But once she is a northerner they begin to make comments. (P4-AB-I)

The Northerners are always the ones making and setting limits to female children to the extent that these practices have hampered their development by limiting the girl’s opportunities in so many ways, especially in terms of going to school and in terms of employment. The worst part of it is the fact that being uneducated is not a viable option for girls these days. Sexist as it may sound, but truthfully very seldom that a man would want to take a girl who is not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills but will soon provide the man with liability in many aspects. In this case, the girls will open their path to modern slavery. Being a tender woman is not enough to guarantee a happy life with the spouse, and the same applies to man. While girls must be exposed to domestic chores, nevertheless, they must be made aware of their worth in the family and the society as a whole.

The above discussions were identified as some of the factors affecting gender imbalance in Northern Nigeria. This will eventually hamper the effectiveness of full attainment of equity in access to education. A different case can be observed in southern Nigeria where female dominance is prevalent and gender imbalance concerns more in males as indicated in the figures presented. Few men pursue higher education while the girls go to school as it conforms to the orientation. From the beginning, they believe that they can utilize and use their female children as assets. It has become a culture among some of the communities in Nigeria to rely so much on the female children than they do on their male counterparts. This was revealed from the documents obtained from a related organization as indicated in the figures in the paper.

Therefore, in the north, more awareness should be inculcated concerning the rights and potentials of female children in being the assets of the family. Otherwise, they will relive and reinforce the long-standing stereotypes and inequity against women. It is not at all unconventional to be an educated mother as she will become the very first mentor to her children. Being a mother also necessitates skills in home management and ways to administer tasks in the house. The children will model the behaviour and manner of the mother than they do of their father’s.

The more you have women in better positions, the more other girls look upon her as a model to emulate. So, there are so many things that we can see that hampers, hinders the development of participation of the girl child, the respondents commented. (P3-UC-I).

Socio-Economic Background

It is highly emphasised that government intervention is needed to assist female applicants who wish to enrol in university programmes from these respective states. The group from the affected states with very low female enrolment should support the indigenes who are prepared to go to universities and those who wish to be admitted into the universities. Many of the respondents cited that the educationally backward

states have low enrolments because there is a lack of government support. This is reflected by the fewer students or candidates who sat for University Matriculation Examination compared with those from other regions, especially when the southern states are more developed in terms of education than their northern counterpart. When the researcher specifically asked one of the respondents on the alternative practices towards improving female participation regarding access to university education, he illustrated:

Assuming the Sokoto State government buys these forms and distributes them free to female students. Let some politicians buy University Matriculation Examination forms and distribute them free to the indigene in their areas, that will help increase the enrolment because even if we want to admit students from these areas if they do not apply, there is nothing we can do. (P1-U-I)

The interviewees emphasised on the need for the government to participate in providing schemes and the assistance to the intended applicants. They indicated the inability and lack of affordability of the students to purchase university admission form have hindered them from pursuing into higher education, even if they managed to possess the required national credits under their belt. One of the respondents narrated:

These same people who enjoyed free education; they are the ones in charge today. However, they have forgotten, and it is a challenge. Even here in Sokoto many of the students we give them admission here, but they cannot even register because they cannot afford the fees, despite all the policy backing given to them of paying a lesser amount compared with others. And you want to convince me this government is serious about given people equal opportunity, how? Do not forget this education is a right, not a privilege. But in Nigeria the government is seeing it as a favour I think that is why they are not serious about it in real sense. (P4-U-I)

The respondents also revealed that apart from the fact that many applicants cannot afford to buy the application forms, the introduction of computer-based University Matriculation Examination (UME), have also caused many candidates from Sokoto state and northern region failed to get admission simply because they cannot use the computer, as shown by the records. Despite the applicants knowing the answers to the questions because they do not have the required skills, they failed to answer the questions asked in the examination, rendering the examination to become ineffective and invalid. One of the participants stated:

You see a building most have a foundation, the problem now from my experience in this university being situated from an educationally less developed area and largely the states that constitute catchment area are educationally less developed many students have been failing this UME on annual basis, and we have moved to online examination system while many of our secondary school graduates have not seen a computer in their life. Therefore, this is a challenge to these states; they should either wake up or the university will be serving other people. (P3-U-I)

One of the participants from the university commission emphasised:

Sincerely speaking the state government are not doing enough to address this problem especially the disadvantaged states, they need to come up with policies and programmes towards achieving this policy. (P3-UC-I)

In the admission body, another interviewee stressed the need for policy intervention at the state levels:

In my point of view the federal government has all it could have based on the resources and the commitments at its disposal; now what's lacking is the state government to come up with micro policies towards the main objectives. The federal government has provided the university, and that is it's own. How people should get to the university ... it's left to state government. (P1-AB-I)

These revelations and findings indicate that government intervention to help applicants get access into the universities is strongly encouraged. Furthermore, the state governments need to reform their primary and secondary schools to prepare their students to the new computer-based University Matriculation Examination (UME) to ensure equal opportunity and access to university education.

Discussion, Recommendation and Conclusion

Specifically, one of the significant recommendations made by the findings of the study is to encourage female participation in Sokoto state. Available data from the university, the university commission and the admission body showed that the rate of female participation in Sokoto region is very low compared with the southern parts of the country. However, in some states, the number of female applicants is more than that of male applicants. The rate of female students in university education at Sokoto state is worrisome, and these challenges have been affiliated to two major issues which are the social upbringing and cultural orientation.

The society upbringing of the female child in the family is a major factor affecting women development in Nigeria. These include enrolment into schools of western education from the perspectives of Islamic religious doctrine. The cultural orientation of setting limits to girls right from their childhood days affect the scope of their reasoning that limits their ability to compete with their male counterparts. These findings are in agreement with those of Imogie and Eraikhuemen (2008), and Adeyemi and Akpotu (2004).

In the last two to three decades, at various levels, discrepancies in terms of equity of access to education and gender disparity are increasing. In Nigeria, as elsewhere in the world, the level of female enrolment and their access, particularly at the second and third levels of the education system is low. Osagie (2008) observed that the female enrolment at the primary level of education was low and impacted the university education, though this has been generally attributed to the failure of universal education policy objectives at the national level (Salihu, & Jamil, 2015). At the regional level, several studies conducted have shown that the average male enrolment is higher than female enrolment, except in the South Eastern Region (Atuora, 2006). Such disparity has also been observed in gender enrolment into universities across Nigeria, specifically in northern Nigeria.

Furthermore, socioeconomic factors have also been discovered to be issues militating against the effective implementation of policy to offer equal educational opportunities on access to university education in Nigeria. Data from the findings indicated that many students cannot afford to pay for their registration fees even after getting admission into various degree programmes. Many students are qualified but they cannot get admitted into universities, partly because they cannot afford even to buy forms to register for the University Matriculation Examination (UME). These problems cannot be separated from the social-economic status of the applicants. This study emphasises the need for policy intervention to provide scholarships and student loan schemes. These findings are in agreement with that of the study conducted by Roy (2014), entitled "Important Sources of Financial Aid for Students from Nigeria."

The socio-economic status (SES) is a key that charts a child's schooling journey. It determines the child's fate in education as substantiated by past studies, which found that socio-economic status is a factor of a child's education (Baharudin & Luster, 1998; Eamon, 2005; Hochlid, 2013; Jaynes, 2012; Majoribanks, 1996; McNeal, 2001; Seyfried, 1998). Children from low SES have always been those with low enrolment compared with those from the middle class. From the findings so far, the present study recommends that the secondary school level should be looked into as it is the threshold for higher education, poor-performing students at the secondary level will lead to poor results in the School Certificate. Consequently, they will not be able to transit to higher-level education. Compulsory female education should be introduced in Nigeria to enable females to gain access to university education. This could be implemented probably through law enforcement, especially in the northern part of Nigeria and particularly, the Sokoto region.

The governments should take action and make it mandatory for all universities to establish distance-learning programmes so that the maximum number of students can gain access to university education. Distance learning not only benefits young people but also housewives who can have access to education even from their homes; this strategy will ultimately enhance the access to education and increase the education rate. E-learning provides the platform to the students who desire university education to get access to the university, to learn and develop their capabilities, skills and knowledge. Loan scheme opportunities with established modalities of repayment should be introduced to encourage indigent and brilliant students, not to drop out. Employing organisations that stand to gain in this knowledge economy should be encouraged to draw investment support programmes of sponsorship to deserving students with a long-term plan to training and employment.

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