

Exploring Access to University Education in Nigeria – A Gender Perspective

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Abstract

Level of access to university education is an indicator of development commonly used as a yardstick for comparing societies. Universities are multi-product institutions, which contribute to the generation and transmission of ideology, the social development and educational upgrading of societies, the production and application of knowledge and the training of highly skilled labour forces. In societies where there is social injustice, inequality and poverty will be endemic and creates poverty traps. Poverty traps, militate strongly against breaking out of inter-generational poverty and inequality. Access to higher education is key to breaking these cycles or marginalisation. The paper examines the relationship between access to higher education with the prism of gender. The extent to which females across the country are disadvantaged in terms of access to university education. Also, the paper examines the need for affirmative action to ensure even development among both sexes. Secondary data on applications and admission into Nigerian universities were obtained from the website of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board. Gender disparity in number of applications and number admitted were calculated across geo-political zone. Females are generally disadvantaged in terms of proportion applying or admitted to Nigerian universities, except for those in the South-East geopolitical zone over the years under review. There is the need to include affirmative action about females in the admission process, this should be part of the social inclusion agenda of Nigeria in ensuring that more people are able to have a mobile shift in their social status.

Keywords: Access, Gender, University, Education

1. Introduction

The development of any economy and the welfare of the people as reflected by the growth and development of such economy is greatly hinged on the available human capital (Imran, 2015). The foremost determinant of the human capita of a country is the level of education of the citizenry, and access to tertiary education is core to enhancing the human capital. Tertiary education is not limited to university education, but it is the apex of all tertiary institutions. Thus, it behoves all countries and states that hope to maximise its available human capital over time need to give access to all citizens irrespective of their creed, gender, or race. The reality is that everything that may be necessary to ensure that the capacity of male and females are enhanced. The consequences of not enhancing the capacity of males and females in a country like Nigeria with about equal male and female population include but may not be limited to having a shortage of either sex in leadership positions in the years to come. The situation may be more pronounced in a patriarchal society like Nigeria where there are cultural and religious beliefs and practices that may hinder females attaining tertiary level of education. Such a scenario will make it difficult for Nigeria to attain some of the international development goals and aspirations.

The previous Millennium development goals had as part of the targets the elimination of gender disparity at primary and secondary levels of education as core to the achievement of its third goal. This aspiration has been replaced with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goal 5 of the SDG aims to achieve gender equality and empowering of all women and girls by 2030. The targets of the SDG5 include:

- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources in accordance with national laws.
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Prime to the achievement of the targets of SDG 5 for Nigeria is the need to examine the issue of applications and admission into Nigerian universities from a gender perspective, for the likelihood of a woman being adequately represented in leadership roles in both public and private institutions is better enhanced when such a woman has tertiary level of education in general and university education. Thus, there is the need for equal opportunity must be given to females and males in accessing tertiary level of education.

Access to and participation in education and equality between men and women are human rights that have been enshrined in many international conventions, instruments, and declarations. Access to education is not problematic in developed economies like the developing economies, since access to education is not as big an obstacle for women in developed economies. For instance, the ratio of women to men in tertiary enrolment in high income countries in 2012 is 126 percent, while the corresponding figure for low income economies is 65 percent (Amin and Islam, 2015). Access to higher levels of education tends to be restrictive for women in low income economies (Duflo, 2005, World Bank, 2011).

The contributions of education, especially at the tertiary level, to national development is enormous to the fact that, countries, individuals, communities, and corporations invest massively in education to uplift their educational attainment (Akinyemi, et al, 2012). In developing economies, access to education is a crucial element for career development (Amin and Islam, 2015). The situations in the developing economies makes it difficult for women to attain the position of qualifying for important leadership positions like their male counterparts. Amin and Islam (2015) posited that the dearth of many women in leadership positions in public and private institutions like their male counterparts may be due to the obstacles females faced in accessing tertiary education.

Gender-based inequality is a phenomenon that surpasses most of the world's cultures, faiths, nations, and income groups. It cuts across every stratum of the society, nevertheless the situation may be more pronounced in scenarios of extreme poverty, stereotyped gender roles and local customs like early marriage. An established fact is that gender inequality exists in almost every country in the world (Hausmann et al., 2006, world Bank, 2011). The gender-based inequality has the tendency to lead to gender disparity. Gender disparities result from 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.

Filmer et al, (1998) defined gender disparity as the descriptive observation of different outcomes between males and females. They posited that the real differences in gender disparity emerges more strongly in tertiary education. Gender parity reflects' formal equality in terms of access to and participation in education (Hausmann et al., 2008). Formal equality measures numerical gaps between female and male outcomes. Gender parity allows for an assessment of outcomes based on comparisons between females and males., thus the Gender parity index is a veritable tool in assessing the outcomes in education between females and males. In this paper Gender parity index will be used in comparing access open to females in terms of applications and admissions to Nigerian universities. There is gender parity in tertiary education when equal number of females and males have access to tertiary education.

Gender parity index can signal whether social forces may be shifting to allow greater access of girls to schooling, enabling them to catch up with boys in an important dimension of life opportunity. From a gender perspective, the gender disparity in tertiary education may reflect the probability that wider changes are enabling households to view investment in girls' and boys' education in different ways than they did previously. Gender parity when viewed over different points in time can serve as a dynamic indicator of change.

The Gender Gap Index is a snapshot of where men and women stand about fundamental outcome variables related to education (Hausmann, et.al., 2008). Gender Gap Index ranks the geo-political zones according to their proximity to gender equality. The index reveals which geo-political zone have given higher opportunities to women. The zonal comparisons afford the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of geo-political zones in Nigeria in closing the gender gap. The geographical distribution of the index highlights the existence of a strong heterogeneity across zones.

There has been substantial reduction in gender gaps in primary and secondary education in Nigeria, but gender parity in tertiary education remains a challenge in Nigeria. Gender equality needs to be pursued both for social and equity considerations and because it makes good economic sense. For gender equality to be meaningful, mechanisms for ensuring equality of treatment as well as equality of opportunity for men and women are important. In this paper, attention is focussed on the applications and admissions into Nigerian Universities as supervised by the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB). The broad objective of this paper is to examine the extent of gender disparity in applications and admissions into Nigerian University across the geopolitical zones. Specifically, the paper examines the extent to which females across the country are disadvantaged in terms of access to university education.

2. Data and Methods

The data for this paper was based on secondary data on applications and admission between 2010 and 2015 into Nigerian universities obtained from the website of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board. The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board had its legal instrument is empowered to among others conduct Matriculation Examination for entry into all Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education and to place suitably qualified candidates in the tertiary institutions after having taken into account: the vacancies available in the tertiary institution, the guidelines approved for each tertiary institution by its proprietors or other competent

authorities and the preference expressed or otherwise indicated by the candidates for certain tertiary institutions and courses. The examination has now been combined and known as the Universal Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). For many years it was paper based. Computer Based Tests for the matriculation examinations commenced in 2015. The results of the examination conducted by JAMB is not the only determinant on whether a candidate is offered a position in any of the tertiary universities.

The candidates are further screened through the Post-UTME Screening, during the UTME screening there is the policy of Educationally less developed states (ELDS) and catchment states that affect the selection of the candidates. The main basis for selection is on merit and some proportion of the vacancies are reserved for those from both the ELDS and catchment states. These may be part of the reasons for agitations for there to be at least one federal university situated in each state of the federation. In Nigeria presently 23 of the 36 states are classified as ELDS; all the states in the three geo-political zones, are classified as educationally less developed states. Half of the states and one-fifth of the states in the South-south and South-east geopolitical zones respectively are also classified as educationally less developed. It is only in the South-west geopolitical zone that none of the states are classified as educationally less developed.

Proportions, percentages were computed across the geopolitical zones. The female to male ratios in number of applications and number admitted were calculated by geopolitical zone.

3. Findings

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Applications to Universities by Geo-Political zones (2010 – 2015)

Year		Geopolitical zone						Total	Number of Candidates
		North-Central	North East	North West	South East	South South	South West		
2010	Male	16.3	5.1	10.3	21.1	22.3	24.9	100.0	768,907
	Female	12.8	3.0	4.9	29.6	24.0	25.7	100.0	606,041
	Total	14.8	4.2	7.9	24.9	23.0	25.2	100.0	1,374,948
2011	Male	17.9	6.3	10.6	20.2	21.9	23.1	100.0	832,948
	Female	14.3	3.9	5.4	28.3	23.8	24.3	100.0	660,350
	Total	16.3	5.2	8.3	23.8	22.8	23.7	100.0	1,493,298
2012	Male	18.7	6.8	10.1	21.0	20.9	22.4	100.0	839,085
	Female	15.0	4.2	5.3	28.9	23.0	23.6	100.0	664,572
	Total	17.1	5.7	8.0	24.5	21.8	22.9	100.0	1,503,657
2013	Male	19.0	6.9	12.5	19.9	20.4	21.2	100.0	974,591
	Female	15.2	4.2	5.9	28.2	23.4	23.1	100.0	761,090
	Total	17.3	5.7	9.6	23.6	21.7	22.0	100.0	1,735,681
2014	Male	19.1	7.5	13.7	19.8	19.4	20.6	100.0	923,573
	Female	15.8	4.5	6.5	27.6	22.7	23.0	100.0	708,414
	Total	17.7	6.2	10.5	23.2	20.8	21.6	100.0	1,631,987
2015	Male	19.0	7.3	13.8	20.1	19.1	20.7	100.0	796,785
	Female	15.9	4.3	7.0	27.4	22.3	23.0	100.0	629,621
	Total	17.6	6.0	10.8	23.3	20.5	21.7	100.0	1,426,406

Source: JAMB website

The number of applications into Nigerian Universities rose from about 1.4 million candidates in 2010 but peaked at about 1.74million in 2013 and has been on the decline ever since. This is an indication that some Nigerians are beginning to lose their thirst for university education. Across the country over the years more males apply for admissions into Nigerian universities than their female counterparts (Table 1). An examination of the applications by geopolitical zones show that about two-thirds of all applications into Nigerian universities between 2010 and 2015 are from the geopolitical zones in the southern part of the country. At least one-fifth of the applications each come from the three geopolitical zones in the Southern part of Nigeria. In most of the years, the proportion of females applying for admissions into the universities is highest in the South-east geopolitical zone and lowest in the North-east geopolitical zone. The situation may be due to the wave of insurgency and terrorism in the area, coupled with the cultural beliefs that have been in existence before the advent of the insurgency. There is also the practice of early marriage that inhibits the chances of females in the Northern part of Nigeria to seek for tertiary education.

The results show that in the North-central geopolitical zone the number of females applying for spaces in the Universities is slightly increasing, from 12.8% in 2010 to 15.9% in 2015. In the North-east geopolitical zone, the proportion of females applying for admissions also slightly improved from 3.0% in 2010 to 4.5% in 2014 and marginally declined to 4.3% in 2015. In the North-west geopolitical zone, though the proportion of females who applied for admission into the Nigerian universities though small but is on the rise, it was 4.9% in 2010 and has

risen to 7.0% in 2015. Females make more applications for admission into Nigerian Universities in the geopolitical zones in the Southern part of the country than their male counterparts.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Admissions Offered to Candidates of University Education by Geo-Political zones (2010 – 2014)

Year		Geopolitical zone						Total	Number of Candidates
		North Central	North East	North West	South East	South South	South West		
2010	Male	17.6	5.8	10.2	21.7	20.0	24.8	100.0	204,281
	Female	14.1	3.7	5.8	28.1	21.6	26.7	100.0	142,166
	Total	16.2	4.9	8.4	24.3	20.7	25.6	100.0	346,447
2011	Male	19.3	7.4	11.5	19.9	19.0	22.8	100.0	209,371
	Female	16.0	5.1	6.2	26.4	20.3	25.9	100.0	150,709
	Total	17.9	6.4	9.3	22.6	19.6	24.1	100.0	360,080
2012	Male	19.5	6.5	12.3	20.0	19.7	22.1	100.0	230,675
	Female	16.1	4.2	6.6	27.2	21.5	24.3	100.0	166,317
	Total	18.1	5.5	9.9	23.0	20.5	23.0	100.0	396,992
2013	Male	19.1	8.4	14.1	19.0	19.3	20.1	100.0	230,436
	Female	15.4	4.9	7.2	27.6	21.7	23.2	100.0	169,797
	Total	17.6	6.9	11.2	22.7	20.3	21.4	100.0	400,233
2014	Male	18.9	7.9	14.9	17.9	17.7	22.8	100.0	212,025
	Female	16.0	4.4	7.2	25.2	20.9	26.4	100.0	149,330
	Total	17.7	6.4	11.7	20.9	19.0	24.3	100.0	361,355
2015	Male	17.8	10.4	16.1	17.3	17.5	20.9	100.0	237,371
	Female	15.5	6.5	8.6	24.3	21.0	24.2	100.0	178,089
	Total	16.8	8.7	12.8	20.3	19.0	22.3	100.0	415,460

Source: JAMB website

The pattern in the applications is similar to that of the admissions. In the geopolitical zones in the Northern part of Nigeria, the proportion of males admitted into the Nigerian Universities is higher than their female counterparts (Table 2). The reverse holds in the geopolitical zones in the southern part of Nigeria. The fact that all the states in the Northern part of Nigeria are given the status of Educational Less Developed States has not increased drastically the number of people from the geopolitical zones offered admissions into the Universities.

Access to University education is measured by those who applied and were admitted into various course of studies of their choice. The access varies by geopolitical zone and by gender over the years. Over the years under review, less than 30 per cent of applicants were offered access to University education (Table 3). Access to University education has been on the decline; in 2010 only 25.2% of the applicants were admitted, in 2011 and 2012, it became static at 24.1% only for it to continue to decline to 22.1% in 2014. Access has slightly improved to 29.1% in 2015.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Candidates who applied for spaces that were Admitted into University by Geo-Political zones (2010 – 2015)

Year		Geopolitical zone						Total	Number of Candidates that applied
		North Central	North East	North West	South East	South South	South West		
2010	Male	28.6	30.3	26.3	27.2	23.8	26.5	26.6	768,907
	Female	25.9	28.7	27.5	22.3	21.1	24.4	23.5	606,041
	Total	27.6	29.8	26.6	24.6	22.6	25.5	25.2	1,374,948
2011	Male	27.1	29.6	27.4	24.8	21.8	24.8	25.1	832,948
	Female	25.6	29.7	26.6	21.3	19.5	24.3	22.8	660,350
	Total	26.5	29.6	27.2	22.9	20.7	24.6	24.1	1,493,298
2012	Male	27.1	29.6	27.4	24.8	21.8	24.8	25.1	839,085
	Female	25.6	29.7	26.6	21.3	19.5	24.3	22.8	664,572
	Total	26.5	29.6	27.2	22.9	20.7	24.6	24.1	1,503,657
2013	Male	23.8	28.8	26.5	22.6	22.3	22.5	23.6	974,591
	Female	22.6	26.6	27.5	21.8	20.6	22.4	22.3	761,090
	Total	23.3	28.1	26.8	22.2	21.5	22.4	23.1	1,735,681
2014	Male	22.7	24.3	25.0	20.7	20.9	25.4	23.0	923,573
	Female	21.4	20.5	23.5	19.2	19.4	24.2	21.1	708,414
	Total	22.2	23.1	24.6	19.9	20.2	24.8	22.1	1,631,987
2015	Male	27.9	42.5	34.6	25.6	27.3	30.1	29.8	796,785
	Female	27.5	42.5	34.8	25.0	26.6	29.7	28.3	629,621
	Total	27.8	42.5	34.6	25.3	27.0	29.9	29.1	1,426,406

Source: JAMB website

In most of the years under review, highest proportion of applicants admitted into the university is highest among the North East, North-west and North-central geopolitical zones between 2010 and 2013. The question that may be asked is that is the trend observed in the geopolitical zones solely attributable to the ELDS and catchment policies of the government? This may not be totally accurate in that within the same period, those resident in the South-east geopolitical zone had the lowest proportion admitted into the Nigerian universities, though only half of the states in the South-South geopolitical zone are categorised as educationally less developed states. The proportion of candidates being admitted from the South-east geopolitical zone has been declining over the years, and this may have implications soon.

Over the years irrespective of the zone of residence, females have had less access than their male counterparts to University education. This may partly be because issue of gender has not been brought to the fore of the admission process. The reality is that the basis or justification for the policy of Educationally Less Developed States is enough a justification to at least give some level or parity to females in the various geopolitical zones. The females in those geopolitical zones with low levels of admissions becomes worse in that from the onset the females have been placed at some level of disadvantage. This may be part of the reasons why the efforts of government at ameliorating poverty and improving the health status of women and children is not yielding appropriate results.

Table 4: Gender Disparity in Applications and Admissions to University by Geo-Political zone (2010 – 2015)

Year		Geopolitical Zone						Total	Total Number of Candidates across the country
		North-Central	North - East	North-West	South-East	South-South	South West		
2010	Applications	0.62	0.47	0.37	1.11	0.85	0.81	0.79	1,374,948
	Admissions	0.56	0.44	0.39	0.90	0.75	0.75	0.70	346,447
2011	Applications	0.63	0.50	0.40	1.11	0.86	0.83	0.79	1,493,298
	Admissions	0.60	0.50	0.39	0.95	0.77	0.82	0.72	360,080
2012	Applications	0.64	0.48	0.41	1.09	0.87	0.84	0.79	1,503,657
	Admissions	0.60	0.47	0.39	0.98	0.79	0.79	0.72	396,992
2013	Applications	0.62	0.47	0.37	1.11	0.89	0.85	0.78	1,735,681
	Admissions	0.59	0.44	0.38	1.07	0.83	0.85	0.74	400,233
2014	Applications	0.63	0.46	0.36	1.07	0.90	0.86	0.77	1,631,987
	Admissions	0.60	0.39	0.34	0.99	0.83	0.82	0.70	361,355
2015	Applications	0.66	0.46	0.40	1.08	0.93	0.88	0.79	1,426,406
	Admissions	0.65	0.46	0.40	1.05	0.90	0.87	0.75	415,460

Source: JAMB website

The focus of this paper is to examine the level of disadvantage females have even when they constitute about half the population size of Nigeria, the results in Table 4 shows the gender disparity in applications and admissions into Nigerian Universities. The Gender disparity index is calculated based on the number of female to male in each category. Over the years under review, there are on the maximum about 8 females who applied for the UTME for every 10 males. There is higher disparity against females even for those who are admitted into Nigerian Universities. There may be the need for the available need infrastructure in the various universities to be increased so that there are more slots for those who will want to desire university education.

The disparity varies across the geopolitical zones. The disparity is worst in the North-west geopolitical zone where there are barely 4 females to every 10 males who either apply for or are admitted into Nigerian universities. The reverse holds among those in the South-East geopolitical zone in which instead of having gender disparity against females, it is beginning not only to balance out but to tilt in favour of the females. It is only in the South-east that this holds. In all the other geopolitical zones gender disparity still exists.

The annual change in gender disparity over the years, show that gender disparity in applications for UTME is worsening marginally on an annual basis across the country. The pattern is similar in the North-east and North-west geopolitical zones. It is only in the South-west and South-south geopolitical zones that there are marginal increases in the number of females applying for UTME than the males. In the South-east geopolitical zone, the situation is moving towards a 1:1 scenario. The ultimate of any individual with an aspiration for university education is being admitted into the university of her/his choice. While the situation of females is worst in the North-east and North-west geopolitical zones, in terms of those admitted into the universities, even in the South-west there is beginning to be a drop in the ratio of female to male admitted into the university.

4. Limitations

There are two limitations of 'gender parity' indicators. One arises from the understanding that measuring access to and participation in education, whilst important, are limited indicators of change in education, as they do not by themselves tell us very much about processes of education. At best, they are first-order outcome indicators. Second, they are 'static' measures.

5. Conclusions

The issue of gender disparity requires attention more than ever if as a country we will achieve our developmental aspirations and to energise our momentum at mitigating poverty. The lowest number of applications are from most of the educationally less developed states. Thus, there is the need to have novel interventions that will encourage young people in the affected states to become interested in university education. The high level of unemployment of university graduates may be part of the contributory factors to low applications from these geopolitical zones. There is the need to move the society to place more value on the development of human capital, now that we are in the knowledge-age and the other parts of the globe are not going to wait for us as a country. There is the need to ensure that all citizens and indeed all residents of the country irrespective of their creed, gender of locality should have access to tertiary education. The findings of this paper buttress the need to continue the policy of affirmative action to educationally less disadvantaged states in the country. The situation of females in the educational disadvantaged states will be more gruesome without such a policy. Indeed, there may be the need to invoke a clause on gender affirmative action either to be included in the admission process as implemented with the ELDS policy. This will ensure that females are given extra opportunity to have their capacity enhanced. The truth is that even when such women with tertiary level of education are not engaged in public institutions, the effect will be seen in their families, in the way they manage the health of their children. or There may be the need to have affirmative action in ensuring that people from all parts of the country have access to

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