Gender Literacy and Inequality in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract: Gender literacy is defined as the knowledge and ability to critically evaluate gender issues from the socialization aspects and to accept global best practices. Gender literacy is the broad knowledge on gender issues, policies and narratives both locally and internationally. Gender literacy among tertiary institutions stakeholders in Nigeria appear low due to many barriers. This paper discusses barriers to gender literacy in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The paper among other things looks at the concept of gender literacy, conceptual terminologies on gender terms and finally looked at barriers to gender literacy in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Using secondary data collected from print and online publications. The paper concluded that poor funding of gender literacy programme, poor sensitization, cultural factors, religious factor and lack of academic will are barriers to effective gender literacy in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Based on these barriers, the paper hereby recommended that international organizations and government should allocate funds to gender literacy programme implementation in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Centre for gender advocacy should be established in all tertiary institutions and should be properly managed for effective implementation of gender literacy programme implementation. Academic leaders in the tertiary institutions should be trained on importance of gender literacy and advocacy and the need to use their offices to support implementation of gender literacy programmers.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Literacy, Gender Equity, Women's Empowerment

Introduction. Tertiary Education is the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers' Institutes (NTI) (FRN, 2013). According to Ogunode (2021) tertiary education includes Monotechnics, polytechnics, colleges of educations, and

universities. The objective ns of tertiary institution education include: to provide teaching services, providing research services for the development of the country, producing manpower for the country, and aid the delivery of community services.

The tertiary institution system is structured and designed to function with human resources and material resources. The human resources include the teaching staff/academic staff or the Non-teaching/ non-academic staff. The academic staff provides the teaching, research, and other academic services in the tertiary institution while the non-teaching staff provides non-teaching but essential services that complement the academic staff services in the tertiary institution (Ogunode, 2020). The cardinal goal of higher education is to disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, and community service.

Looking at tertiary education from social approach, Ogunode & Odo, (2023) defined tertiary institutions as a micro section of the larger society. Tertiary institutions is an organized fraction of the whole society curved out for teaching programme, research and provision of community service. Tertiary institution can also be seen as a subset of the general society that is made of collection of different people, different culture, different life style and different value. Social problems of most societies are migrated into the tertiary institutions because the societies and the tertiary institutions are inseparable to some extent. Globally, tertiary institutions are found in one social problem or the other. There are many cases of social issue like discrimination, racism, gender inequality and so on.

In Nigeria, there are many social problems and social issues facing the tertiary institutions. One of the social problem is poor level of gender awereness or low level of gender literacy. Issues on gender advocacy, gender sensitization, gender equality, gender equity, gender policies and programme, women empowerment and sexual harassment are often less discussed. On the area of gendered narrative. University of Minnesota, (Undated) noted that gendered narratives in society are absolutely everywhere and touch almost every aspect of our lives. Not only do these messages tell us that gender is determined by our genitals, they also insist that we ought to act certain ways based on what ours happens to look like (for example: men have to be strong and emotionless, while women have to be delicate and submissive, and so forth). These are called gender roles, and they can be particularly distressing to people who identity as TGNC. This is because being a TGNC person inherently conflicts with these narratives, and the cost for not following them often turns out to be forms of stigma and discrimination. Because of a range of factors (generational differences, family dynamics, geographical location, for example), the ways in which we internalize these gendered narratives may differ. Gender Literacy focuses on developing the awareness and skill sets to critically think about socially constructed embedded gendered narratives. Based on this, this paper is examines barriers to effective gender literacy in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification of Terms

Gender

The term gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most societies, being a man or a woman is not simply a matter of different biological and physical characteristics. Men and women face different expectations about how they should dress, behave or work. Relations between men and women, whether in the family,

the workplace or the public sphere, also reflect understandings of the talents, characteristics and behaviour appropriate to women and to men. Gender thus differs from sex in that it is social and cultural in nature rather than biological. Gender attributes and characteristics, encompassing, inter alia, the roles that men and women play and the expectations placed upon them, vary widely among societies and change over time. But the fact that gender attributes are socially constructed means that they are also amenable to change in ways that can make a society more just and equitable (UNFPA, 2005). Gender can simply be defined as masculinity or femininity, taking into consideration biological, social and cultural norms. A person's self-image as a male or female and the roles the person is attached to can be used as gender identity. Gender is a social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender-based roles and other attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts (Adepoju, 2005; Gender Equality Glossary 2020).

Gender Equity

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality (UNFPA, 2005). The process of being fair to men and women, boys and girls, and importantly the equality of outcomes and results. Gender equity may involve the use of temporary special measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination. It refers to differential treatment that is fair and positively addresses a bias or disadvantage that is due to gender roles or norms or differences between the sexes (Gender Equality Glossary 2020).

Gender Equality

Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex (UNFPA, 2005). The concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play (Gender Equality Glossary 2020).

Women's Empowerment

Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private and public levels, and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favour, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life (UNFPA, 2005). Empowerment of women and girls concerns women and girls gaining power and control over their own lives. It involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of

choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality (Gender Equality Glossary 2020).

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for integrating gender concerns in the analysis, formulation and monitoring of policies, programmes and projects. It is therefore a means to an end, not an end in itself; a process, not a goal. The purpose of gender mainstreaming is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in population and development activities. This requires addressing both the condition, as well as the position, of women and men in society. Gender mainstreaming therefore aims to strengthen the legitimacy of gender equality values by addressing known gender disparities and gaps in such areas as the division of labour between men and women; access to and control over resources; access to services, information and opportunities; and distribution of power and decision-making (UNFPA, 2005).

Gender balance

This is a human resource issue calling for equal participation of women and men in all areas of work (international and national staff at all levels, including at senior positions) and in programmes that agencies initiate or support (e.g. food distribution programmes). Achieving a balance in staffing patterns and creating a working environment that is conducive to a diverse workforce improves the overall effectiveness of our policies and programmes, and will enhance agencies' capacity to better serve the entire population (Gender Equality Glossary 2020).

Concept of Gender Literacy

Gender literacy according to University of Minnesota (Undated) comes in, which is all about developing the awareness and skill set to critically think about these gendered narratives. Being "gender literate" means being able to name these gender "rules" while at the same time being aware of what can happen if you don't follow them. If we can externalize these rules instead of internalizing them, we can more easily decide if we want to adhere to them or not. We can develop a critical conscious towards aspects of toxic masculinity and recognize how femininity is often required and devalued at the same time.

Gender literacy are learning strategies for identifying societal gender "rules" and discerning one's own beliefs and values. Gender literacy is a part of building resiliency because being able to validate your own identity amongst negative gendered narratives can help support the development of a positive self-image and healthy and effective coping strategies. Gender literacy is also about helping people to see that sex assigned birth doesn't define your gender identity, gender expression, or your sexual orientation. Being gender literate means that you can take your subjective experience of each of these pieces, and put them together in a way that works for your own, integrated self (University of Minnesota, Undated). From the above, Gender literacy in this paper encompasses all policies and programmes geared towards education the people on the importance of gender equality, gender policies, gender equity, gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender literacy is act of educating the masses on issues regarding gender problems affecting the

society. Gender literacy is all programmes and policies and actions designed to promote gender equity, gender equality and women's empowerment in the society.

Gender literacy in important in the tertiary institutions because it empower both male and female and foster the development of life skills that students need to succeed, such as self-management, communication, negotiation, and critical thinking. They reduce skills gaps that perpetuate pay disparities and help entire countries succeed. School-based gender-based violence and harmful behaviors, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, can be reduced through gender literacy systems. Gender literacy encourage both male and female to appreciate gender development, resulting in increased national prosperity. Gender literacy covers as follows: gender policies, laws, programme and implementation; gender language, gender inclusion, gender awereness, gender problems, gender research, gender advocacies and gender staplers. Gender literacy includes; gender narrative, issues, gender equity, gender equality, women empowerment; the contribution which gender education can bring to the socioeconomic development of the community and the nation; the importance of both individual decision-making on gender matters, and the role of the family, states and nation in collective decision making; the importance of understanding the social and cultural context in which gender issues; the fact that low rates of school enrolment and high rates of drop-outs should lead to greater recognition of out-of-school programmes; and the need to sensitize the decision-makers in Africa on their countries' population situation and problems.

Barriers to Gender Literacy in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

There are a lot of barriers to gender literacy in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. Some of the barriers includes; poor funding of gender literacy programme, poor sensitization, cultural factors, religious factor and lack of academic will.

Poor Funding of Gender Programme

Poor funding of gender programme in the tertiary institutions is a major reason for poor gender literacy among staff and students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Gender programme is very expensive to implement. It required a lot of finance commitment. The funds needed to implement gender programme are not available for the various units or department responsible for educating the staff and students in the various tertiary institutions. Musa (2019) observed that gender programme aimed to educate people in the various universities in Nigeria are underfunded and this has affected implementation of programmes meant for gender sensitization. Ogunode & Ahmed (2021) submitted that inadequate funding is a major challenge facing Gender education in the Nigerian universities. The university system require a lot of funds to implement the gender education programme because it's it is a new programme. The annual budgetary allocation for the administration of universities in Nigeria is inadequate. The inability of the federal government to stick to the UNESCO 15%- 20% of national budget for education is affecting the management of university education in Nigeria.

Poor Sensitization

Another factor responsible for poor gender literacy in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria is poor sensitization of gender programmes in the various tertiary institutions. Many tertiary institutions

staff and students do not have access to gender programme that supposed to be educating them on issues and policies on gender issues. This has affected the level of gender literacy in the tertiary institutions. Gender sensitization according to Mittal (2022) entails modifying one's conduct and instilling empathy in one's attitudes about one's own and other's sex. It introduces men and women to one another and helps to foster respect for all people, regardless of gender. In universities and institutes, gender neutrality is important for a smooth run. Universities should provide a safe environment especially for women who are always at the receiving end of gender inequalities. Gender sensitization tries to raise awareness of this issue among students, parents, and instructors. It assists people in "evaluating their personal attitudes and ideas, as well as challenging the "realities" they believed they knew. It is emphasized that people should be gender sensitized in order to achieve equity. Nigeria's constitution guarantees all citizens of the country equal status and opportunities. Universities must respect the constitutional laws and should ensure safety, neutrality inside their campuses and gender education. There are many agencies of federal and state government charged with responsibilities of sensitizing the public on ender related issues. Also, there are many local and international organization established for ender advocacies in institutions like the tertiary institutions. The inability of theses public and non-governmental institutions to constantly sensitize the stakeholder in the tertiary institutions is responsible for low ender literacy. Poor gender sensitization in the tertiary institutions accounted for the low gender literacy in the tertiary institutions. National Gender Policy, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006) and (Ogunode & Ahmed & Yahaya 2021) identified weak public institutions as one of the factors responsible for

Society and culture

Cultural factor is also a major problem that has affected gender literacy in the various tertiary institutions. Culture can be defined as the societal norms people encounter within their community. A cultural norm can be defined as something acceptable within society. For example, it is acceptable by many Muslim people for women within that culture to be seen with a Hijab, or head s covering. A culture is a way of life of a group of people-the beavior, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are been practiced. Culture is a concept that encompasses the social behaviour, institutions, and norms in human societies well as the knowledge, value, beliefs, arts and laws. Many Africa culture forbid gender equality system and are against such education. Adepoju, (2005) noted that society and culture go hand in hand. Society can simply be defined as a group of people living in an area, regenerating its members through reproduction and sharing the same culture as in knowledge, habits, belief, art, morals, law and custom. Both society and culture are dynamic and prone to change. The goal and significance of what is and could become of the population (i.e. people) in the future occupy a very vital place in the philosophy and the history of traditional African societies (Nigeria in particular), hence, great emphasis is placed on the importance of life, the eternity of the human being and the immortality of the community. These are constantly preached and reinforced through family formations, kinship systems and initiation ceremonies (Adepoju, 2005). The perpetuation of each family, clan or line of descendants or community is of major concern, hence all political, economic, cultural, spiritual and ideological efforts are geared towards this end. Given this scenario, it can be deduced that gender literacy is one of the major concerns of traditional societies and that the ideology on which traditional gender literacy was based was biological which perfectly corresponded with the then prevailing socio-economic conditions. In Nigeria cultural heterogeneity, multiculturalism, ethics, social status and other traditions perpetuate rules and norms that affect the perceptions of parents,

teachers and others and therefore serve as catalysts against the successful implementation of gender literacy in the country.

Religious Factor

Religious factor also contributed to poor gender literacy among the staff and students of tertiary institutions. Both Christians and Islamic dogma encourage women to be taught more in areas that will make them good mothers and wives. The purdah system practiced in Islamic religion was the extreme case of shielding women from gender education as well as western civilization. Girls were inhibited from listening to ender issue that is contrary to their religious beliefs. Girls were denied the opportunity of gaining knowledge and skill relating to gender equality. Alaba (2018) and Adepoju, 2005) observed that the attitude of many Nigerian towards gender education is poor due to their religious belief. Many Nigerians are religions sensitive and .Religion plays an important role in gender policies and programme as its principles, regulations and practices affect people beliefs and attitude in everyday interactions. Ogunode & Ahmed (2021); Ogunode (2020); Ogunode, Lawan & Yusuf (2021) and Olonade et al, (2021) maintained that religious beliefs affects gender equity and gender equality behaviour in the society. Fazl in Adepoju, (2005) noted, "Islam endorses any form of beneficial knowledge which must be acquired by every Muslim male or female and also recognises the dynamic of change in human societies as long as human reason is not placed at par or above divine wisdom". That is, God is the source of all knowledge hence any subject of study must be founded in the parameters set by and through revelation. It is also believed that Christianity is the friend of government because; it is the only religion that changes the heart (Adepoju, 2005). It is unfortunate that religion continues to pose a daunting challenge to the successful implementation of gender literacy programme. While Christianity is seen as less rigid and highly adaptable to societal change, Islam is very rigid and not receptive to any subject whose content is at variance with its ideals. The idea of intermingling of people of the opposite sex, half-naked dressing and female assertiveness is seriously frowned at by Islam. It is strongly believed that religious knowledge, be it Islam or Christianity helps children to cultivate religious attitude towards life and orientate them towards self-purification, self actualisation and socialisation. Both Christianity and Islam do not see the need for gender literacy (Adepoju, 2005).

Lack of Academic Will

Lack of academic will is another factor that is responsible for poor gender literacy among the stakeholders in the tertiary institutions. Lack of academic will refers to the inability of leaders in academic environment to support policies, programme and initial technique support for gender programme implementation and gender sensitization programme in the various tertiary institutions. Academic will is very crucial in gender literacy implementation in the tertiary institutions. Gender literacy programme needs support and academic will to be successfully implemented in the tertiary institutions. Femi (2019) submitted when the academic support is lacking to support implementation of policies, programme and projects on gender equity, gender equality, gender representation, gender awereness, women empowerment, gender laws and advocacies in the tertiary institutions. This serve as barriers to young persons' inability to access gender information either on campuses contributing immensely to high prevalence of poor gender literacy among the youth. Gender literacy in Nigeria is about providing vital information on gender equity, gender equality, gender representation, gender awareness, women empowerment, gender laws and importance of gender equality in relation to the inculcation of good practices and reinforcement of values and

group norms against gender violence and sexual harassment. Whether this information is accurately provided by the various institutions is another challenge for gender literacy in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender literacy is defined as the knowledge and ability to critically evaluate gender issues from the socialization aspects and to accept global best practices. Gender literacy is the broad knowledge on gender issues, policies and narratives both locally and internationally. This paper looked at barriers to gender literacy in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The paper concluded that poor funding of gender literacy programme, poor sensitization, cultural factors, religious factor and lack of academic will are barriers to effective gender literacy in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Based on these barriers, the paper hereby recommended the following;

1. International organization and government should allocate funds to ender literacy programme implementation in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

2. Centre for gender advocacy should be established in all tertiary institutions and should be properly managed for effective implementation of gender literacy programme implementation.

3. Academic leaders in the tertiary institutions should be trained on importance of gender literacy and advocacy and the need to use their offices to support implementation of gender literacy programmers.

4. The federal, state government should rolls out a national programme on value re-orientation on gender equality and gender literacy programme.

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