An Assessment of the Institutional Factors Affecting Female Labour Input in the Nigerian University System

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Abstract

Education is generally identified as a major factor for women empowerment. This is because education improves the individual's quality of life and offers a person access to employment, income and political power. Women's education is thereby a key to gender equity, justice, poverty reduction, and importantly, a major variable in national development. To explore this further, this study assessed the institutional factors which affect female labour input in the Nigerian university system. Using a purposive random sampling, twelve of the 27 Federal Universities in Nigeria (located in the six geo-political zones of Nigeria), were selected for the study. Data collection techniques included the use of structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. A total of 730 females, comprising academic, administrative and technical staff, were selected using a stratified sampling technique to ensure that women were represented amongst the rank and file.

Study findings show that female staff found their job schedules stressful, difficult and are unable to maximize their potentials due to dearth of adequate working facilities, poor salaries, overcrowded work schedules, delayed promotion, insufficient provision of research grants, lack of adequate childcare facilities for nursing mothers and lack of supportive gender friendly policies. The study provides strategies for improving institutional practices which positively enhance the contribution of women within the Nigerian university system and more importantly, it provides the framework for engendering the system and thereby provides tips on how to make the Nigerian university system gender responsive and gender friendly.

Introduction

Nigeria is endowed with abundant human and material resources. At independence in 1960, agriculture accounted for more than 50 percent of the gross domestic product and for over 70 percent of its export earnings (Adeniyi, 2008). The majority of the women were in agricultural and informal sectors of the economy and produced over 90 percent of the domestic food supply (Aina, 1998). However with an increase in access to higher education in recent decades, women have realized significant gains in educational attainment and have occupied many positions in the formal labour markets. Due to what some refer to as the *glass ceiling*, they have not achieved much success in advancing to higher level managerial and professional jobs (Katz & Khan, 1996). The University which is a medieval creation and which came into existence in Nigeria during the pre-independence era over 50 years ago, is one of such labour sectors in Nigeria in which sex segregation is glaring. Women constitute a low percentage of both the academic and non academic staff of universities in Nigeria and in most parts of the world.

Generally, the structure of the university is patriarchal in nature. This is reflected in its decision-making process which is devoid of input from women. Especially notable is the relative scarcity of women holding senior academic and administrative positions. The relative flexibility of work which enables the scheduling of particular tasks to accommodate the differential needs of workers would seem to have been favourable for women to make a lot of gains in the university labour sector; yet, women are significantly under represented in its work force and are unable to make substantial contributions to the growth of the university. Despite the various world conferences and conventions held on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, equality of opportunity to advance in academia and in university administration has not been matched with equality of distribution. Research provides evidence of the continuing pattern of disadvantage characterizing women's employment in universities. Statistics show that in 2002, females constituted 13 percent of the entire academic staff and 30 percent of the administrative staff population in Nigerian universities (Okebukola, 2002). More recent data reveal that in 2006, the number of academics increased to 17 percent and administrative staff to 35 percent (FOS, 2006). In spite of

this increase, males still overwhelmingly dominate the university labour force. Recent research results show that although 37 percent of academic employees in Norwegian universities are females, there is still a considerable vertical and horizontal imbalance between the genders. The analyses also reveal that the higher one goes in the academic hierarchy, the lower the proportion of women and it would take many years before a gender balance among university staff can be achieved. In the United States, women comprise 27 percent of associate professors and 15 percent of full professors. They comprise only 6.9 percent of Vice Chancellors among the top positions in commonwealth universities while many countries have no women Vice Chancellors (Ristad & Rigstad, 2007).

These analyses reveal that the university environment is dominated by males and therefore lacks the culture and structure that encourage women's full participation. In Nigeria for instance, universities lack formal channels of information on promotion, research and conference opportunities. Institutional repository which is a critical factor and a good avenue to disseminate intellectual output to the outside world is lacking. Consequently, females mostly cluster around the middle and junior cadres of the university career structure. Those in academics are placed at a disadvantaged position during promotions because they do not publish enough books and journal articles as much as their male counterparts. Rather they spend most of their time teaching and about a quarter of it in research. The remaining quarter is divided between administration and service to the community (Ogbogu, 2006).

The female non-academic staff are also hardly visible in the top decision making bodies in the universities. Consequently, the dearth of females in the Nigerian university labour sector has been recognized as a social problem which has grossly affected their labour input in the system. This trend indicates that a *glass ceiling* of unstated norms and distorted expectations inherent in the patriarchal culture of universities hinder women from maximizing their potentials and reaching the peak of their career. For instance, universities in Nigeria lack policies which create a responsive climate for integrating work and family responsibilities which are essential for effective performance of females. Sometimes females are regarded as problems rather than as assets. They are invisible where information for empowerment is gathered and networking is done. Furthermore, the commonly used systems of committees for appointing

people to different assignments though transparent, mostly favour males. Since they are hardly represented in these committees, women are therefore expected to conform to the rules of the majority males, which indicate the continuing presence of a *glass ceiling.* This makes the university environment and some of its practices unfriendly for women to perform to their maximum. Literature suggests that a "chilly climate" which promotes the marginalization of female staff and reinforces masculinist practices exists and continues to be the norm in universities (Bennet, 2002).

   Institutional barriers limit the advancement of women and their ability to contribute maximally to the growth of universities. However, there is little understanding of how the structure of work and other institutional practices act to produce a stratified university environment which places females at a disadvantaged position. Institutional practices refer to those practices that stem from the formal procedures, culture, policies and rules of universities which are unfriendly to females. They do not only constitute barriers to their advancement, but also perpetuate and reproduce gendered inequality in Nigerian universities. For instance, there are no policies which advance the university's ability to practice gender equity in its hiring and promotion practices and in some of its other internal functions. Much less attention has been paid to transforming the structure and practices which militate against women's advancement in the university system. This study therefore proposes that certain institutional practices and patterns among other consequences affect the opportunities for women's advancement and increased performance. Attempts shall therefore be made in this study to identify the flaws in these practices and cultures within universities in order to provide explanation for the trend in the labour input of females in the system. The study would provide the stimulus for more effective action to be taken in developing strategies in overcoming institutional barriers that impact on women's advancement and productivity in universities.

Theoretical Issues and Framework

   Considerable errors have been made in interpreting how organizations operate because traditional approaches to the study of organization do not take into account gender differences. Women spend most of their days

in work organizations that are almost always dominated by men. For instance, the majority of them are found in a narrow range of disciplines and specialties in the universities. Universities as organizations see themselves as liberal and open minded, yet their own modes of governance, particularly with regard to gender related issues seem to negate this view. Universities by their unique nature are expected to be a repository of the most specialized and skilled intellectuals, whose role irrespective of gender is crucial in making a difference in university education production function. It is therefore in the context of a more reflective and systemic theoretical framework that this paper would be presented.

The theoretical model that informs this research emerges from the social system theory in which Benitez (2003) proposed that university consists of various units and systems which are characterized by sets of diverse activities. These sub-units interact with the environment and are linked at various levels by coordinating systems. Benitez added that universities consist of a process of input variables, some interferences and measurable outputs that are the end product of the inputs and interferences. The inputs are mainly university policies such as recruitment, promotion, salaries as well as university values. The interference are facts or events representing the individual's condition which cannot be changed such as age, educational background, status, number of children, and so on. The outputs are variables that are measured at a specific period of time indicating how things are at that moment or how much they have changed in order to evaluate their trend. Measurable outputs according to Benitez are collected from the university documents. The information which can be of a qualitative or quantitative nature portrays the situation of the university itself with regards to issues such as the gender distribution by levels or departments, the organization of work teams that gives a value of women's presence in the system, wages and number of hours worked.

Benitez used the social system theory in explaining the gender disparity and the trends in the labour input of females in the university. He emphasized the need to examine the environment in order to detect whether there are conditions or constraints limiting the access of women to a given position and in the performance of their jobs. These conditions according to him may not just be cultural or socio-economic in nature

but they may be local and typical of the university system. Benitez's concept allows for a formal analysis of the actual situation in the university. It helps to know at which point of the decision chain, there exists a gap or barrier for women to progress in the university. This implies that barriers to women's participation in universities cannot just be attributed to factors from the individual or society, rather organizational factors such as those related to the management, teaching and research culture of the university should be put into consideration. Benitez's views support the propositions of the Gender-Organization-System model (GOS). They assert that male/female differences in job performance and attitudes are not necessarily gender-linked but situationally and structurally induced. This implies that organizational factors and the larger social systems are interlocking variables which affect females on the job and determine their labour input (Aina, 1996).

Nigerian universities are yet to identify and examine the differing needs of women in their labour force, neither have they improved on those aspects of their policies and institutional practices which act as barriers to women's advancement in the system. This study therefore provides a basis for assessing and gaining a fuller understanding of the institutional factors underlying the observed low and disproportionate labour input of females in the Nigerian university system.

Research Objectives

In this study an attempt has been made to accomplish the following objectives:

- To assess the labour input of female academic and non-academic staff in Nigerian universities,
- To identify and examine the institutional factors which affect female staff in the university system and the implications on their job performance,
- To review strategies for enhancing the labour input of females in Nigerian universities.

Methodology

The survey research design method was adopted for this study. Female staff in Nigerian universities constituted the population for this study. Data for the study were generated from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were solicited through the use of structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, while secondary data were obtained from journals, textbooks, the internet, official government publications and other relevant literature.

Federal universities located in the six geo-political zones of Nigeria were used for the study. The main feature which justified the choice of federal universities is the fact that they are older, well established and have more physical facilities and a wider range of disciplines. To ensure that the universities in all zones had an equal chance of being included in the sample, the purposive random sampling technique was used in selecting two universities from each zone, bringing the total number of universities used to twelve.

A homogeneous group consisting of females in Nigerian universities whose ages ranged from 21 years to the retirement age of 60 years for non-academic staff and 65 years for academic staff constituted the population for the study. In order to compare the labour input of females across the various job categories and to also determine the institutional factors which affect their performance in Nigerian universities, the stratified sampling technique was used in administering questionnaires on 730 females grouped into 381 academic, 225 administrative and 124 technical staff respectively. This was done to ensure that women were represented amongst the rank and file of the university labour force.

The samples were obtained from six randomly selected faculties of the universities, cutting across the social sciences, education, arts, science, engineering and medicine. The questionnaire was made up of 34 items divided into three sections. The first section solicited personal and demographic information from the respondents. The second section enabled the researcher to elicit the various experiences and contributions of females to teaching, research, technical services and administration. The third section was structured to provide information on the institutional factors which affect their labour input in the university

system. The validation of the questionnaire was carried out by experts in measurement and evaluation, while the reliability was established through a pilot test. Thereafter, the instrument was first administered on the sampled subjects. In addition to the questionnaire, in-depth interviews were carried out with 120 purposively selected female university staff occupying key academic and administrative decision-making positions in the selected universities used for the study. They were selected because their position in the universities predisposed them to provide useful information for the study. The in-depth interview provided greater insights into the implications of the identified practices and policies on females and their job performance.

Data collected were subjected to statistical treatment using descriptive statistical analysis, while the qualitative approach was used in analyzing the data gathered from the interview sessions. Recommendations on the best strategies to adopt in engendering Nigerian universities to be more gender responsive were drawn from accounts in published materials.

Results and Discussion

Profile and Background of Respondents

The female respondents used for this study cut across the three major job categories in Nigerian universities. The female administrative staff respondents constituted 30.8 percent of the total sample, the academic staff accounted for 52.2 percent while 17 percent of the respondents constituted the technical staff category.

The majority (83.0 percent) of the respondents were married, while 11.20 percent were single. The widowed accounted for 5.1 percent of the total sample, while the divorced (0.4 percent) and the separated (0.3 percent) were of quite an insignificant value. It is significant to note that the majority of the sample were married. This implies that in Nigeria women are able to combine work outside the family with their familial responsibilities (Aina, 1996).

Data on the educational status of the sample revealed that 33.9 percent of the administrative staff possessed bachelors degrees, 12.0 percent claimed they had diplomas, while 4.4 percent possessed professional certificates. The fact that the majority of the administrative

staff possessed bachelors degrees indicates that Nigerian universities employ staff with adequate entry qualifications. Further enquiries on educational qualifications revealed that 48.1 percent of the academic staff possessed doctoral degrees, while 41.9 percent had master's degrees. This data supports the fact that the acquisition of a doctoral degree is a prerequisite for entry and growth in academia. Most of the technical staff (43.7 percent) possessed higher national diplomas, while 26.6 percent possessed bachelors degrees.

Generally, the results show that all the three categories of female staff in Nigerian universities possess the relevant prerequisite qualifications for the jobs they perform.

An Overview of the Contributions and Labour Input of Females in Nigerian Universities

In the universities, just as in most other organizations, specific functions are assigned to each member and category of staff in order to realize the basic goals and objectives of such organizations. Teaching, research and service are the three historic purposes of universities around the world (Cummings, 1998). In addition to these, the university has an array of staff that perform administrative and technical functions in order to complement the teaching and research aspects of the university functions.

Table 1 shows the contributions of female staff to teaching, research, technical services and administration in Nigerian universities. Figures on the Table 1 provide information on how much administrative, academic and female technical staff contribute to these various job schedules.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Female Staff Contributions to Teaching, Research, Technical Services and Administration

N (%)

Staff Category	Job Schedule				Total
	Teaching	Research	Administrative	Technical Services	
Administrative	11(4.9)	-	214(95.1)	-	225(100)
Academic	274(71.9)	105(27.6)	2(0.5)	-	381(100)
Technical	5(4.0)	16(12.9)	-	103(83.0)	124(100)
Total	290(39.7)	121(16.5)	216(29.6)	103(13.8)	730(100)

Figures in Table 1 indicate that 95.1 percent of the female administrative staff sampled performed more of administrative job schedules than teaching services (4.9 percent). Although the female administrative staff are strictly administrators, a few of them who occupy executive positions in the system are called upon to teach and deliver lectures in workshops and seminars organized for both staff and students. A further enquiry about the type of administrative job schedules performed by females as revealed from the comments of the interviewees was that women hardly chaired committees. Rather they attended to files, drafted and responded to official letters and performed routine duties that were mainly supervisory and secretarial in nature. The interviewees attributed the disproportionate trend in the contribution of females to top management job schedules in the universities to the existence of a *glass ceiling* in the system and in the belief that only men make good decisions.

Data in Table I further show that the majority (71.9 percent) of the female academic staff engaged in teaching than research (27.6 percent) activities, while 0.5 percent of them performed administrative jobs. This is disturbing because promotion for academic staff is based on contributions to research and publications, while contributions to administration and teaching are not perceived to have equal weight and go unrewarded. The use of this criterion affects women adversely because they publish less and devote more time to teaching. This is evident from the comments of the interviewees who noted that the majority of the female academics were only able to publish a paper annually, while a few published up to two. Others were unable to publish on an annual basis, but ensured that they taught their courses effectively. They added that

the few women amongst them who are intellectually aggressive were regarded as deviants by their male colleagues. They opined that though the use of publication criteria is quantifiable, it is not particularly appropriate for rewarding achievement in an education environment, rather teaching effectiveness is a better one even if more difficult to measure.

Results in Table 1 further reveal that a higher percentage (83.0 percent) of the female technical staff provided technical services, 4.0 percent engaged in teaching, while 12.9 percent participated in research activities. A further insight was provided by the females interviewed on other job schedules performed by female technical staff. They noted that they were more involved in setting up materials for experiments during science classes and utilized the opportunity to teach and demonstrate to the students the best methods of using the materials. They however expressed dissatisfaction with being marginalized by their male colleagues from participating in services which involve the management, repairs, maintenance and purchase of laboratory equipment.

Generally, results in Table I show that female staff in the three major job categories in Nigerian universities sometimes perform jobs that overlap. This goes to confirm the fact that both the administrative and technical staff perform duties that complement those of their academic colleagues and together they enhance a balanced operation of the university system (Okebukola, 2002).

Institutional Barriers Affecting Women's Advancement in Nigerian Universities

Institutional barriers are factors that are embedded in or stem from the formal procedures, culture and rules of universities. These procedures include recruitment and job assignment practices, promotion systems, administrative regulations, policies regarding gender issues, work environment, organizational structure, stipulations regarding training programmes and provision of research grants. Institutional cultures denote those norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that direct the behaviour and performance of staff (Ogbogu, 2006). An examination is made of how these institutionalized mechanisms affect the labour input of females and their advancement in the Nigerian university system in

Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Female Non-Academic Staff Opinions on the Institutional Factors Which Affect Their Labour Input in Nigerian Universities

N (%)

Factors	Staff Category					
	Administrative			Technical		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Lack of Adequate Childcare Facilities for Nursing Mothers	130(57.8)	95(42.2)	225(100)	68(54.8)	56(45.1)	124(100)
Inadequate Working Facilities for Technicians and Administrators	188(83.6)	37(16.4)	225(100)	111(89.5)	13(10.4)	124(100)
Delayed Promotion	155(68.9)	70(31.1)	225(100)	111(89.5)	13(10.4)	124(100)
Poor Salaries and Incentives	163(72.4)	62(27.5)	225(100)	99(79.6)	25(20.1)	124(100)
Overcrowded Work Schedule	130(57.8)	95(42.2)	225(100)	74(59.6)	50(40.3)	124(100)
Lack of Supportive Gender Friendly Policies	95(42.2)	130(57.8)	225(100)	58(46.7)	66(53.2)	124(100)
Criteria for Promotion	123(54.7)	102(45.3)	225(100)	64(51.6)	60(48.3)	124(100)
Criteria for Recruitment	100(44.4)	125(55.6)	225(100)	55(44.3)	69(55.6)	124(100)
Organisational Structure	84(37.3)	141(62.7)	225(100)	64(51.6)	60(48.3)	124(100)

Table 2 shows the responses of female non-academic staff (administrative and technical category) on the institutional factors which affect their labour input in Nigerian universities. Results in the Table 2 show that inadequate working facilities was the major factor which impacted on the labour input of both the administrative (83.6 percent) and the technical (89.5 percent) staff. Female staff cannot maximize their potentials nor increase productivity when there are inadequate facilities to work with. In Nigeria and in most Third World countries, available input elements in the universities are inadequate and overstretched due to unavailability of funds for maintenance and provision of modern ones. This accounts for the slow rate at which women progress through the ranks. Working facilities in Nigerian universities require improvement in order to empower women to cope with the new job demands and

massification of university education in the 21st century.

Data in Table 2 indicates that 89.5 percent of the technical staff specified that delay in promotion was a major obstacle to their growth on the job. The female technical staff interviewed in this regard commented that they found it difficult to develop a positive self image, because they are excluded from the informal communication and support opportunity among men. This, according to them, is like an old and exclusive men's club. Universities need to redesign their promotion policies to reward performance in technical job schedules as it affects women. The female administrative staff who indicated that their promotion was delayed was 68.9 percent. Although promotions seems to be more rapid for administrative staff at the lowest rung of their career ladder, it is difficult for them to be promoted beyond the present Principal Assistant Registrar Position, which is equivalent to a Senior Lecturer's grade. This is because academic departments can have some multiple Professors, but there is only one appointable Registrar in administration, with two Senior Deputy Registrars and a few Deputy Registrars. Competent administrators may be left marking time for years if there is no vacancy at the top.

Both the administrative (72.4 percent) and the technical (79.8 percent) staff indicated that poor salaries and incentives were major factors which affected their labour input in the universities. This has led to high turnover of female staff from the university system, because they feel insecure, uncertain, frustrated and unable to meet the skyrocketing inflationary prices of goods and services.

The administrative staff who indicated that lack of adequate childcare facilities for nursing mothers and overcrowded work schedules accounted for their low labour input was both 57.8 percent. It is interesting to note that both variables affected the female administrative staff on an equal basis, than they did for the technical staff. These results corroborate Ball's (2003) assertion that women work hard to maintain a balance between work and family, but receive little support for it. In addition, due to the competitiveness and globalization of the market of higher education, there currently exists the "performative" culture in universities characterized by unremitting diet of 'targets, indicators, evaluation and dead lines' that mount much pressure on female workers. There are neither corresponding supportive structures nor policies in universities

that can help women cope with the rapid changes and demands in the work system (Macfarlane, 2007).

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Female Academic Staff Opinions on the Institutional Factors which Affect Their Labour Input in Nigerian Universities

N (%)

Factors	Staff Category Academic		
	Yes	No	Total
Lack of Adequate Childcare Facilities for Nursing Mothers	219(57.5)	162(42.5)	381(100)
Insufficient Provision of Grants for Female Academics	274(72.0)	107(28.1)	381(100)
Inadequate Research and Teaching Facilities	247(64.8)	134(35.2)	381(100)
Delayed Promotion	250(65.6)	131(34.4)	381(100)
Poor Salaries and Incentives	268(70.3)	113(29.7)	381(100)
Overcrowded Work Schedule	292(76.6)	89(23.4)	381(100)
Lack of Supportive Gender Friendly Policies	263(69.0)	118(31.0)	381(100)
Criteria for Promotion	216(56.7)	165(43.3)	381(100)
Criteria for Recruitment	166(43.6)	215(56.4)	381(100)
Organisational Structure	196(51.4)	185(48.6)	381(100)

Table 3 shows the responses of the female academic staff on the institutional factors which affect their labour input. Results in the Table reveal that the majority (76.6% percent) of the respondents reported overcrowded work schedule as a major factor which hinders their input. The interviewees attributed this to limited funding of universities in Nigeria. Universities have therefore become business oriented as they chase alternatives to government funding. Under such circumstances talented female academics find that promotion to the top level becomes increasingly difficult as teaching loads increase and leaves little time for study and research which is the yardstick for promotion.

Further results on Table 3 reveal that 72.0 percent of the respondents indicated that insufficient provision of grants by universities for female academics affected their labour input. The female interviewees specifically emphasized the fact that grants for scholarly work and travels for international conferences are not readily available to enable female

academics improve on their research output. Funding is a prerequisite for effective research and a major variable for professional development if made available to females.

The respondents who indicated that poor salaries and incentives affected their input were 70.3 percent. The salaries and general conditions of service in Nigerian universities are uninspiring and unmotivating, while the attainment of the basic necessities of life has gradually become a mirage for the dedicated academic. An interviewee added that the existing despondency and lack of university's support can obliterate the committed university academic.

Other institutional factors which affect females as shown in the Table 3 include: lack of gender/friendly policies (69.0 percent), delayed promotion (65.6 percent), inadequate research and teaching facilities (64.8 percent), lack of adequate childcare facilities for nursing mothers (57.5 percent) and promotion criteria (56.7 percent). Much remains to be done in Nigerian universities regarding the promulgation of gender friendly policies necessary for promoting and developing women in academia. Poole (2005) in support of this view, affirmed that women can only maximize their potentials and make progress on the job if they are encouraged through gender-friendly policies. Promotion procedure which requires the completion of a doctorate, publications, along with academically-oriented process of evaluation act as barriers for women as evident in the responses provided in Table 3. These processes take a lengthy period of time. For instance, scholarly publications as well as achievement of prominence in scholarly societies is built up over time. Although women are capable of conforming to organizational requirements, many have strong commitments to their familial roles and are unable to devote as much time as men to research. It is significant to note that despite the fact that universities include service and teaching as part of their promotion criteria, lip service is paid to them. Responses from the interviewees on promotion issues revealed that service activities and teaching go unnoticed and unrewarded. They are underneath and are not perceived to have equal weight with research and publications. They advocated that Nigerian universities should redesign their promotion and tenure policies to reward performance in teaching and service, because these two job aspects are no less valuable, although they are perceived as more difficult to measure and evaluate.

There is need to challenge some of the university's culture, such that women would be allowed to enjoy a sensible work and home-life balance, if their productivity is to be maintained. Universities should eradicate norms that systematically disadvantage women by creating a work environment which respects and allows them to thrive without demanding that they become like men. A major challenge therefore is to proactively address institutional culture, policies, practices and workplace behaviours in order to empower women and increase their output. It should be realized that policies without corresponding changes in culture and practice have limited impact.

Strategies for Advancing Women in the Nigerian University System

Research provides evidence of a continued pattern of disadvantage which characterize women's employment in Nigerian universities. Currently, policy changes and innovations are slow and have not yet produced the changes required to ensure that women contribute maximally to all aspects of university operations. Nigerian universities are not proactive at providing a work environment that would enable women function effectively in the vital sectors of the system.

This paper therefore recommends the adoption of "mentoring" in Nigerian universities as advocated by Geber (2006) in his Wonder Woman Project. This strategy which is a professional socialization method connects younger protégés with more experienced individuals through a network of support. The experienced female professionals connect younger women with interesting colleagues who advise, guide and help them understand the context in which they should operate, so that they can professionally develop themselves. Mentoring is thus a collaboration strategy that encourages and acknowledges diversity.

There is the need for Nigerian universities to emulate Australian universities for their renowned mechanism for promoting and sustaining women through staff equal opportunity and affirmative action policies (Carlson, 2005). The policies do not create conflicts between having children and establishing an optimal career path. In Nigeria, universities should include gender equity performance measures and quality assurance processes as part of their institutional strategic plans. The adoption of

top-down policies that are gender friendly and which make provisions for both parental leave and flexible work schedules for mothers is advocated. These top-down policies are also instruments for eliminating institutional barriers to women's advancement in universities.

Departmental policies and procedures regarding issues on recruitment and promotion must be made transparent. Such policies should make provisions for female staff development by supporting their further education and making available grants for research and conferences. Provision should also be made for an increase in the representation of females in committees where decisions that affect them in universities are made (Geber, 2006). Women, more than men, need help to advance in the university system. Consequently, their equitable distribution in leadership positions is thus essential for their advancement in the system.

If university is to be society's instrument for developing a culture of peace, sustainable human development founded on equity, justice, solidarity and liberty, the importance and relevance of the gender dimensions in its practices must be fully addressed. Women need to be a part in developing the university and society based on sustainable human development in the 21st century.

Conclusion

This study has revealed a clear picture of the contributions of females to the various job schedules in the Nigerian university system. It is evident that females are more active in routine administrative job schedules and teaching activities than research. They are hardly visible in top decision-making committees where policies which affect them are formulated. The disproportionate trend in the contributions of females to the various job schedules in the universities and the slow rate at which they advance through the rank, is attributed to the existence of a *glass ceiling* of unstated institutional norms and practices inherent in the system. An examination is made of how these institutional mechanisms affect the labour input of females.

It is evident that there are not enough corresponding supportive structures nor policies in Nigerian universities that help women cope with the rapid changes and demands in the work system. Policy innovations are slow and the universities are not proactive at providing an enabling

gender friendly environment for women to excel. Universities should strive to eliminate factors within the system which affect female staff job performance. This would enable them showcase to their immediate communities the benefits which come from equitable representation of females at all levels and across all disciplines. In view of this, mentoring which is a collaborative strategy that connects younger protgs to the more experienced ones through a network of support is recommended as a way forward. Universities have the responsibility to lead the drive for equitable representation of women in the workplace and act as role models to government and businesses with whom they interact. Nigerian universities must therefore deal effectively with institutional and new equity barriers arising from changing economic and cultural climates in the country. New creative approaches must be taken by universities to deal with emerging institutional barriers to women's efficiency on the job in the 21st century.

Acknowledgements

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