



Research Paper: Gender-Leadership in the Ivory Tower: A Case Study of Institutions of Higher Learning in Taraba State



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Abstract

Objective: This study investigated Gender-Leadership in the ivory tower, a study of institutions of higher learning in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Methods: Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Simple random sampling method was used to select a sample size of 372 academic and non-academic staff for this study. The instrument used for the study was Gender- Leadership Questionnaire (GLQ). Hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test.

Results: The findings revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. Furthermore, the findings revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. women representation in leadership positions is lopsided in favour of their male counterparts.

Conclusion: Factors that contribute to women underrepresentation in leadership positions includes cognitive bias, uneven access to knowledge, opportunities and administrative responsibility and societal privileges that favour the males among others.

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1. Introduction

For decades, the issue of gender representation in institutions of higher learning has been an ongoing concern, globally (Rosa & Clavero, 2022). This gender representation is seen across global higher institutions, where women continue to be under-represented in senior leadership roles in higher institutions in the United Kingdom (Manfredi et al., 2019). With a staggering 24.3% of women advancing to vice-chancellors and principal positions and 23.6% advancing to university board chairs. However, women represent more than half of the higher education workforce in the United Kingdom (Manfredi et al., 2019). Several extant studies have looked at some of the underlying causes of gender representation in institutions of higher learning (Zulu, 2019), and posited findings such as structural issues that underpin women's career progression. Such as organizational cultures that are based on gender, and cognitive bias which places women at a disadvantage, and tends to overrate men and underrate women (Manfredi et al., 2019). In the long run, some of these challenges could pose national security challenges, if not handled properly.

Gender representation in institutions of higher learning is a vital factor in enhancing equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusiveness in educational settings (UNESCO, 2019). It is generally known that achieving gender balance in higher institutions is not only a matter of social justice but also has implications for national security. Statistics indicate that female enrollment in these institutions is disproportionately lower compared to male

enrollment (Dada, 2020). The underrepresentation of women in higher education not only limits their access to knowledge and opportunities but also perpetuates gender inequalities in society. This gender gap raises concerns about the inclusiveness and fairness of the educational systems in Taraba State. Gender representation in institutions of higher learning has broader implications for national security. National security encompasses various aspects, including economic stability, social cohesion, and political resilience. Gender disparities in educational opportunities can hinder the development of a skilled and diverse workforce. When women are underrepresented in institutions of higher learning, their potential contributions to the economy remain untapped. This limits the overall economic progress and stability of Taraba State and Nigeria as a whole (World Bank, 2012). Furthermore, gender balance in educational institutions foster social cohesion by providing equal opportunities for all members of society. When women are excluded or underrepresented, it reinforces societal inequalities and marginalization. This can lead to social unrest, as marginalized groups may feel excluded from decision-making processes and experience a sense of injustice (Htun et al., 2016). There continues to be concern about the need to develop more women leaders in all sectors and industries in most countries around the world. This includes the need for more women to be positioned to take on critical leadership roles within higher education (Susan, 2012). The situation of women,

under-representation is worse in Nigeria where women academics were denied maternity leave under the University Law and in some cases, they were not allowed to get married or have children (Olaogun et al., 2015) while others were even refused employment despite the fact that they were qualified (Eboiyehi et al., 2016).

Studies have shown that women generally are under-represented in top leadership positions in Africa. This fact has been revealed by the survey done across 10 African countries in 2007 Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe and found that “even though women constitute over 50 percent of the higher education, workforce, only eight percent were vice chancellors and 12 percent were registrars; while 21 percent of women were appointed as deputy vice chancellors and executive directors” (Madimbo, 2016). Many women take maternity leaves or request shorter workdays to take care of their children. This, too, can hinder their chances of being considered for promotions. There may be simple answers to explain these trends, such as women are more likely to have their careers interrupted by parental leaves (Acker & Armenti, 2004), or are unable to stay long due to home and parenting responsibilities, or are hired with less experience than men. Women are facing many obstacles which led them to lag in leading organizations and find strategies to overcome those barriers which differ from those of their male counterparts (Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

There are various forms of women discrimination such as job segregation, wage gaps, sexual harassment, the denial of career development opportunities (including mentoring and poor performance evaluations), and a lack of promotion chances. Hence, being a woman who works in an organization and the mother who raise family could be seen as a serious concern on sex and gender biases that women could not be good managers who can perform multiple priorities. However, various efforts have been done over the years worldwide, aiming at improving the condition of women in managerial level of higher education (Dezsö & Ross, 2012) with assistance from the United Nations and its specialized agencies, but females still suffer from being involved in top decision-making discussions as well as taking senior leadership positions like Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Deans of faculties and Directors of institutes (Mohajeri et al., 2015). These facts have been witnessed in previous studies (Fitzgerald, 2013; Rubini & Menegatti, 2014).

Accordingly, the meaningful participation of women in national, local, and community leadership roles has become an important focus on global development policy. Still, some may ask why it matters if women become political leaders, elected policymakers, or civil society activists. Why does the world need more women involved in all aspects of the political process? Women's political participation results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and a more sustainable future. Across theories,

one commonality among gender equity literature is that participation of women is important in leadership positions to bring critical perspectives and insights often overlooked by traditionally male-dominated structures (Madsen, 2012). It has been argued that women's limited participation in executive positions in the global economy is a misuse of talent and human capital that has led to missed opportunities for gender parity and skill advancement (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2016). Organizations and institutions that women are represented in the leadership and policy making tend to be more diverse and inclusive. The rulings and the decisions in those organizations also tend to be more diverse, more representative, and inclusive of the different views and modern views of society (Wilson & Graham, 2019). Abalkhail (2005) notes that countries that have more women in leadership positions tend to have lower levels of income inequality and discrimination. Thompson (2015) asserts that women in leadership positions tend to yield more benefits for the general population especially in the general health of the population.

Taraba state is in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria and is one the regions where gender disparities persist in institutions of higher learning. Taraba State, like many other regions in Nigeria, is faced with enormous gender differences in its institutions of higher learning. The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within Taraba State institutions of higher learning raises concerns about gender equality and its potential implications for national security. Despite progress in education and gender equality,

women continue to be significantly underrepresented in top leadership roles such as vice-chancellors, deans, department heads, and other influential positions like the senate of the university. The lack of gender diversity in leadership may have profound consequences for the overall development and security of the nation. Currently, there is a limited understanding of the underlying factors contributing to the gender gap in leadership positions within Taraba State institutions of higher learning. It is essential to explore the root causes, barriers, and systemic biases that prevent women from attaining leadership roles. Additionally, the potential implications of this gender disparity on national security, particularly in a state as diverse and significant as Taraba, need to be examined and its significance for the nation. This study therefore intends to:

1. Examine the status of women representation in leadership positions within Taraba State institutions of higher learning.
2. Determine the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The design adopted by the researchers in this study is descriptive survey design. The rationale behind adopting this design is because, descriptive research employs surveys and use of questionnaires to analyze variables and describe current state of a problem.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised all the staff in two tertiary institutions in Taraba State. The sample size for this study was 161 Academic and 211 Non-academic staff. To get this sample, the researchers utilized stratified sampling. The population was divided into two strata based on gender. Thereafter, simple random sampling method was used to arrive at a sample size of 372 respondents that participated in this study.

2.2. Instrument

Gender Leadership Questionnaire (GLQ): This instrument was structured and designed by the researchers in 2023. The questionnaire was designed based on a 4-points Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was divided into two sections; section A contained personal data of the respondents, while section B contained 10 items measuring women representation in leadership. To ensure the validity of the instrument, three experts from the Faculty of

Education, Taraba State University carried out a face and content validation of the instrument. Their corrections and recommendations were crucial in producing the final draft of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha and the internal consistency for the instrument was found to be 0.78; therefore, the instrument was adjudged to be reliable.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data collected by the researchers were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions, while inferential statistics of t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

Research question 1: What is the status of women representation in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State?

Table 1

Mean Ratings & Standard Deviation Scores of women representations in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State.

SN	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	The gender representation in leadership positions of this school is lopsided	207	62	61	42	3.17	0.88	Agreed
2	The principal officers of this school are mostly males	248	62	62	0	3.50	0.93	Agreed
3	2 out of 10 management staff are female	284	58	14	16	3.64	0.91	Agreed
4	Sensitive positions and assignment are mostly handled by male in my school	251	49	43	29	3.40	0.90	Agreed
5	Most HODs, Deans, Directors of unit, members Governing council, senate committee are male	71	83	134	85	2.38	0.89	Disagreed

The results shown in **Table 1** presents the descriptive statistics in frequencies, mean and standard deviation, the views of the respondents on the status of women representation in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State. The mean scores of the respondents shows that item 1, 2, 3 and 4 are above the cut off mean of 2.5, indicating an agreement with the items on the status of women representation in leadership positions. However, item 5 disagrees with the statement with a mean score lower than 2.5. This implies that gender

representation in leadership positions of this school is lopsided, principal officers of this school are mostly males, the males are mostly holding sensitive position. The standard deviation scores ranged from 0.88 to 0.93, indicating homogeneity amongst responses and a similar consensus.

Research question 2: What are the factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State?

Table 2

Mean Ratings & Standard Deviation Scores of factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions within Institution of higher learning in Taraba State.

SN	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
6	Cognitive bias, underrating women cognitive capacity	201	104	41	26	3.29	0.94	Agreed
7	Uneven access to knowledge, opportunities, and administrative responsibility	154	108	94	54	3.18	0.86	Agreed
8	Family issues and household duties	18	108	209	37	2.29	0.92	Disagreed
9	Culture and religious values are responsible for imbalance in representation	112	58	28	174	2.29	0.90	Disagreed
10	Societal privileges that favour masculinity	224	29	93	26	3.21	0.89	Agreed

The results shown in **Table 2** presents the descriptive statistics in frequencies, mean and standard deviation, the views of the respondents on the factors contributing to

women underrepresentation in leadership positions. The mean scores of the respondents shows that item 6, 7 and 10 are above the cut off mean of 2.5, indicating an

agreement with the items on factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions. However, item 8 and 9 disagree with the statements. This implies that factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions includes cognitive bias, uneven access to knowledge, opportunities and administrative responsibility and societal privileges that favour the males. The standard deviation

scores ranged from 0.86 to 0.94, indicating homogeneity amongst responses and a similar consensus.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff.

Table 3

Summary of the Analysis on the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff

Groups	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-Value	α -value	Decision
Academic Staff	161	3.339	0.491					
Non-Academic Staff	211	3.225	0.510	370	1.99	0.823	0.05	Rejected

Source: Field Work (2023)

Table 4 is a summary of t-test analysis conducted to compare the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. The table revealed that, p-value of 0.823 is greater than the α -value of 0.05 ($p = 0.823 > \alpha = 0.05$) hence the null hypothesis which says (there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership

positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff) was upheld.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff.

Table 4.

Summary of the Analysis on the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff

Groups	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	P-Value	α -value	Decision
Academic Staff	161	2.709	0.456					
Non-Academic Staff	211	2.721	0.453	370	0.253	0.717	0.05	Rejected

Source: Field Work (2023)

Table 4 is a summary of t-test analysis conducted to compare the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. The table revealed that, p-value of 0.717 is greater than the α -value of 0.05 ($p = 0.717 > \alpha = 0.05$) hence the null hypothesis which says (there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff) was upheld.

4. Discussion

The results obtained revealed that gender representation in leadership positions of this school is lopsided, principal officers of this school are mostly males, the males are mostly holding sensitive position. The findings also revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of women representations in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. This finding agrees with Rosa and Clavero (2022) that gender representation in institutions of higher learning has been an ongoing concern. The implication of this finding is that women underrepresentation has been a thing of concern and worry that needs to be addressed in no distant time. This is because, it is generally known that achieving gender balance in higher institutions is not only a matter of social justice but also has implications for national security. Findings by Dada (2020) also

indicates that female enrollment into leadership positions in higher institutions is disproportionately lower compared to male enrollment. This means that underrepresentation of women in higher education do not only limits their access to knowledge and opportunities but also perpetuates gender inequalities in society which may pose a threat to national security and increase the rate of social injustice.

The findings also revealed that, factors contributing to women underrepresentation in leadership positions include cognitive bias, uneven access to knowledge, opportunities and administrative responsibility, and societal privileges that favour the males. The finding also revealed that, there is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Taraba State institutions of higher learning between academic and non-academic staff. This finding agrees with previous research conducted by (Eboiyehi & Fayomi, 2016; Olaogun et al., 2015) on gender inequality among staff in Nigerian institutions that, the rate of women underrepresentation in leadership position is high. Alarmingly, these studies also revealed that, women who are even more qualified than most men, are ignored when it comes to selection for employment, and being involved in critical decision-making discussions. The finding also aligns with previous study conducted by Mohajeri et al. (2015). The researchers point out that, females still suffer from being involved in top decision-making discussions

as well as taking senior leadership positions like Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties and Directors of Institutes. The implication of this finding is that, since women are still grossly under-represented especially at the height of the leadership ladder, proper measures that encourage equal chances for both male and female staff of higher institutions can be put in place to address this challenge. One of the limitations of this study is that, while this study sheds light on gender representation in Taraba State, what is obtainable in this region may not be applicable in other regions.

5. Conclusion

This study revealed that women representation in leadership positions is lopsided in favour of their male counterparts. Factors that contribute to women underrepresentation in leadership positions includes cognitive bias, uneven access to knowledge, opportunities and administrative responsibility and societal privileges that favour the males among others. Addressing these factors can contribute to a more diverse, inclusive, and effective national security apparatus which can lead to improved decision making, innovative solutions and stronger foundation for addressing complex security challenges. Based on the results of the findings, it is recommended that equal opportunity policies should be formulated and implemented in all higher institutions in Nigeria. Similarly, gender sensitivity trainings and transparent selection criteria should be adopted by all Nigerian higher institutions. In the same vein, university authorities should consider the implementation of diversity and inclusion

initiatives to address cognitive biases, promote equal access to knowledge and opportunities, and distribute administrative responsibilities fairly.

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Conflict of interest

The authors do not have any conflict of interest to report. Also, this research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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