

# **Participation of Women in Higher Education Research Among Academic Women in Nigerian Universities**

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## **Abstract**

*There is no gain-saying the fact that among the activities that go on in Nigerian universities, among which are pure and applied research, extension service and continuing education, community service, consulting services, reference bureaus and cultural events, research has been recognized as the major function of higher institution. Research is a procedure for a continuous examination of ideas to test their validity, facts to prove their accuracy, hypotheses to determine their merits and generalization to verify their applicability to novel situations and their reliability for repeated use (Henderson and Henderson, 1975). The development and functions of research face a lot of problems, which are gender related, politically, economically, socially and health related. This paper highlights the participation and role of academic women in higher education in Africa and Nigeria, in particular. It discusses the problems that militate against the effective participation of women in higher education research in Africa and Nigeria, towards sustainable development of the continent at large. Consequently, suggestions are presented. It is hoped that these will aid women's effective participation in higher education research for sustainable development of Nigeria and Africa at large.*

## **1. Introduction**

Education is the most important tool for unlocking any nation's development potentials (African Network Campaign on Education for All, 2008). University education all over the world provides opportunities for learning at its maximum level towards sustainable development. Such learning covers the humanities, health and basic sciences, the social sciences and technology. The learning activities include pure and applied research, extension service and continuing education, community service, consulting services, reference bureaus and cultural events. Out of these activities, research seems to be the pivot on which all other activities turn or balance. Research is a procedure for continuous examination of ideas to test their validity, facts to prove their accuracy, hypotheses to determine their merits and generalization to verify their applicability to novel situations and their reliability for repeated use (Henderson and Henderson, 1975). Research is also central to the total processes of development of the human ability and behavior or the achievement of social competence and growth, which is the main function of the educational process of teaching and learning in higher institutions. There is no gain-saying the fact that both men and women are part of the educational development through research.

There has been a serious concern in recent times concerning women academic's participation in higher education research. Academic women are required by the conditions of their employment to be actively involved in conducting research in their various fields of study. They are to contribute their quota in improving the conditions of people in their families, nation and the world. It is also important to emphasize that university academic appointment demands equal participation of male and female staff in research, publication, teaching and other activities. These demand diligence, extra-working hours and compiling results, which may involve field trips and travels. (Owuamanam, 2008).

## **2. Women in academic activities in the world**

Reports from some parts of the world reveal that women are underrepresented in the sciences when rated with men. Wilson (2004) reported that in Montana State University, United State of America, women accounted for only a very small portion of the scientists, mathematicians and engineers working at the

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nation's top research universities. He stated that male faculty members out-numbered female professors, even in the few scientific disciplines where women could earn more Ph.Ds than men. This imbalance, according to Wilson (2004) has troubled many academics for years.

In Nigeria, studies have established that women education in all fields have improved over the years (United Nations Development Program, 1997; Federal Government of Nigeria, 2007). The Federal Government report stated that the total female academic researchers in Nigerian universities in 1990/91 academic session were 1157 and by 1996/97 academic session, it had risen to 1961 females. This means that the population of women researchers in Nigeria is increasing when compared with about three decades ago when very few women academics were struggling to compete with male colleagues in research work. For example, Egunjobi, (2008) reported that she was the first African woman member of the Academic Staff of the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine, University of Ibadan, Nigeria and remained the only woman until 1970. However, the quality and quantity of education available to literate females determine their participation in research activities. It is cheering to note that Nigeria craves for patriotic citizens to develop their potentials politically, economically, socially and technologically (Oniye, 2010). He further stressed that the actualization of the goals is dependent on the provision of functional education to females and the opportunity to participate in research of various kinds.

It is worth mentioning that many women academics are seriously carrying out research on important issues affecting humanity and the nation. The gap between men and women in research participation in number and quantity of research output is still wide despite the recorded increase on the part of women. What could have been responsible? There are problems militating against women academics' effective participation in research in Nigerian higher institutions. It appears to be the same in other African countries. The problems have to do with women's multi roles as home makers, lecturers, researchers and individuals who have desires for personal development. Other factors include their occupation of positions in universities, participation in academic activities, health problems, social and cultural expectations, unstable governments, economic and financial problems.

This paper, therefore, discusses the problems that militate against effective participation of academic women in higher education research, in an effort to promote sustainable development of Nigeria and the continent of Africa, at large. Suggestions of solutions to the problems are also discussed.

### **3. Problems Militating against Women's Effective Participation in Research**

Women academics have multiple roles as mothers and home makers in the first instance. They are mothers and in some cases, religious leaders who play vital roles culturally. The struggle for a balance between teaching, lecturing and researching is always frustrating (<http://women in higher education.html>). The fractured nature of academic life, with its conflicting demands, quality teaching, up-to-date scholarship, the pursuit of original research and the cultivation of substantial partnerships with external communities, creates extreme tension in the working life of any academic not to talk of a woman academic. In a study on women, research and researching productivity and constraints among women academics in post 1987 universities, Deane, Lesley, Jones and Nicola (1996) revealed a desire for a balanced lifestyle that would significantly involve "not cheating on my family".

Many women academics occupy positions of authority in the universities. Such positions usually take much of their time at work. The little time they have to carry out researches would have been utilized attending meetings and supervising. Health and family problems are other constraints that slow down effective participation of women in research in Nigerian higher institutions. The young woman academic seeks to satisfy the home front. Pregnancy, care of children, husband and the home do militate against women academics as they desire to investigate issues around them and in communities. Social and cultural expectations in the African society could be hindrances to effective participation, too.

Formerly, women were engaged in and around their homes in vocations such as dying, weaving, pot and mat making. On their own or in the family farms, women weeded or planted, in an attempt to help their husbands in the up-keep of the family. In those days, the family head and his wife or wives worked on the farms in various farming activities. Commonly, spouses were found in the company of one another most of the times. As women leave the company of their husbands, contrary to what operated in the olden days, for employment outside their homes, casual observations showed that there had been conflicts arising from the demands and expectations of marriage and their employment as academics (Ogunsanmi, 2001). The process of marital relations, especially, affectionate intimacy between spouses has been affected by employment (Adegoke, 1987). Due to their employment status, women who occupied dual roles had a lot of strains, emotionally and psychologically. These affected the degree of affectionate intimacy between them and their husbands. Unlike in the past, women academics go out of their homes for long hours researching. Hence, they are not in the company of their husbands as it was before the advent of western education. The Nigerian woman academic in the past, then chooses between her home and research.

Political instability of government - change in government - constitutes problems and especially when different government policies are put in place in the educational sector. It is a known fact that there is a problem of funding in all higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Grants for research are not available in most institutions. Also, at times, there is no motivation on the part of the Federal and State Ministries of Education and individual institutions.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

There is no gain-saying the fact that there are problems and challenges among women academics in higher institutions in Nigeria, in an attempt to carry out researches. These problems are concerned with being mothers or females, who have multiple roles as mothers, care givers in the home, role models in the society and community, career women, leaders who hold positions of authority at workplace, the religious environment and in the community. Health issues, financial and economic problems, lack of motivation and time are other great constraints militating against their effective participation in research.

It is, therefore, recommended that women academics should be encouraged by all means possible so that they could complement their male counter- parts in national development as observed by Odu (2009). They need supports as home makers, mothers and spouses in conjunction with being academics in their desires to help in the realization of sustainable development of the African continent.

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