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COUNTRY
REPORT:
NIGERIA

The Centre for Higher Education
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COUNTRY REPORT: NIGERIA

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OVERVIEW

- Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, and the seventh most populous country in the world, with ongoing growth. From approximately 42.5 million people at the time of independence in 1960, Nigeria's population was estimated at over 206 million individuals in 2020. Demographically, the country is young, with 62.5% of the population under the age of 24, and an annual population growth rate of 2.6% (UNFPA, 2020).
- Nigeria gained independence from Great Britain in 1960. By mid-2016, it had overtaken South Africa as the largest economy on the African continent.
- English is the official language, but Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fula, and English Creole are also widely spoken.
- There are three major religions in Nigeria: Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (ATR).
- Nigeria has overtaken India as the poverty capital of the world (AllAfrica, 2019). Despite a substantial oil and gas sector, accounting for more than 90% of the country's exports and 80% of the Federal Government's revenue, there are major problems with wealth distribution. In 2019, 91.16 million Nigerians were living on less than a dollar a day.
- The literacy rate for women remains lower than for their male counterparts, and is also affected by age. For instance, for women aged 65+ years, the literacy rate is below 18%, compared to 40% among males (UNESCO, 2020b).

Table 1: Literacy Rate by Age Group

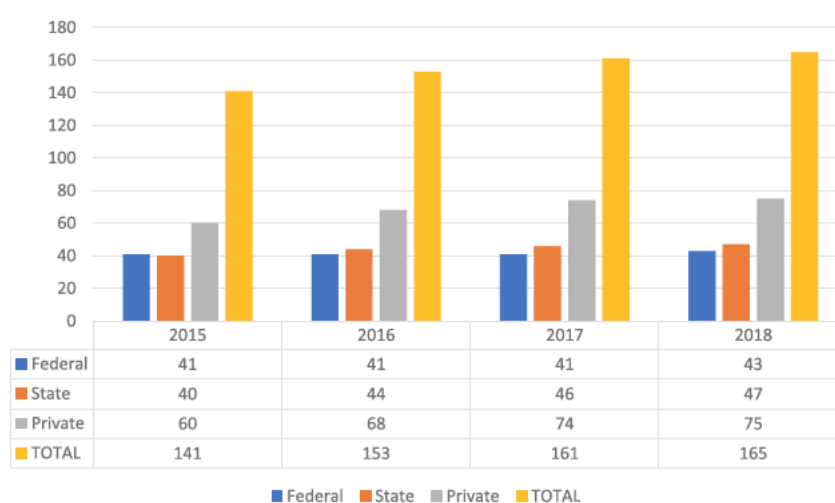
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	
Literacy rate (%)				
15-24 years	75	81.6	68.5	(2018)
15 years and older	62	71.3	52.7	(2018)
65 years and older	28.3	40.1	17.6	(2018)

Source: UNESCO, 2020b

HIGHER EDUCATION

- Nigeria’s higher education system is characterised by expansion. The first higher educational institution in Nigeria, the Yaba Higher College, was established in 1932. When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the country had six research-focused universities. By 2018, Nigeria had 170 universities (National Universities Commission, NUC, 2019).
 - I. 43 federal universities;
 - II. 48 state universities;
 - III. 79 private universities (Statista, 2020).

Figure 1: Growth in Number of Universities from 2015–2018



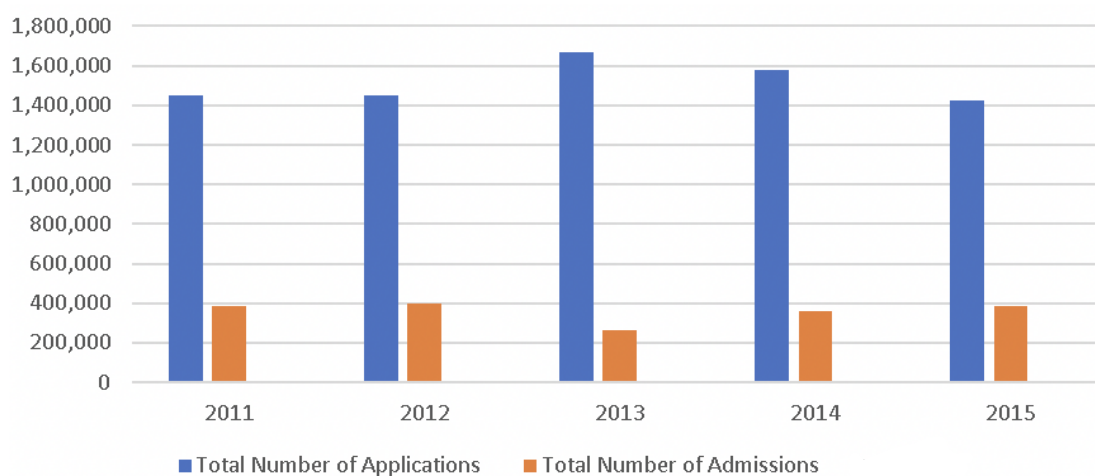
Source: National Universities Commission (NUC), 2019

- 66.1% of students are in the 43 federal universities, while 27% are in the 48 state-owned universities and 6.9% are in the 79 private universities. The latter are owned, largely by churches, some by Muslim organisations, and by individuals (NUC, 2019).
- Private higher education is expanding – largely because the state capacity has been insufficient to meet the demand for university places (Iruonagbe & Egharevba, 2015). Almost 300 new private universities are planned to help cope with Nigeria’s rapidly growing youth population (Grove, 2018). Concerns about quality relate to the private sector, but also to the state universities (Adedeji et al., 2019).

CHALLENGES FACING HIGHER EDUCATION

- The major sources of funding for Nigerian universities are government (federal and state), faith-based organisations, business, and non-profit organisations (NUC, 2019). The running costs of Nigerian universities in 2018 were 2 billion USD (NUC, 2019). Federal universities do not charge tuition fees for undergraduate studies; however, there are minimal other charges. All private universities and some state universities charge tuition fees for undergraduate studies (NUC, 2019).
- Despite the rapid expansion of Nigeria’s higher education system, demand continues to outstrip supply. Whereas Nigeria has under 200 universities for its population of over 200 million, six of the ten most populous countries in the world, e.g. Mexico, have over 1,000 universities.
- Every year since 2010, the number of students who register for the university matriculation exam (Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, UTME) has significantly exceeded the number that are admitted into universities.

Figure 2: Disparity in the Number of Applications and Admissions to Universities in Nigeria

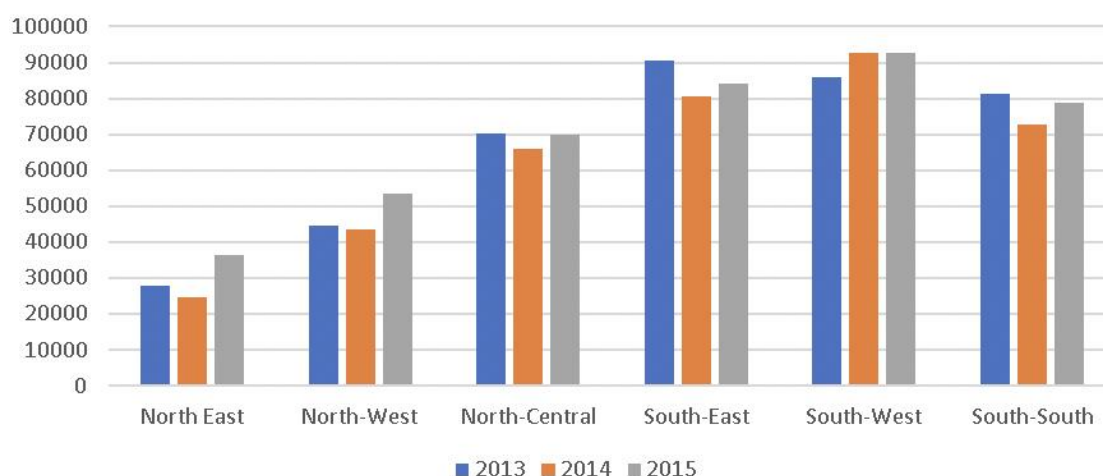


Source: Agbaire, 2018

- A policy of widening access to higher education was adopted in the 1980s to promote poverty reduction and inclusion, especially for those from ‘educationally less developed states (ELDS)’ (Ezebuilo & Nwosu, 2014; Odejide et al., 2006). A quota system was introduced by the central government for admission to federal universities in terms of three policy criteria: Academic Merit (45%), Catchment Area (35%), and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) (20%) (Agbaire, 2018; Igbineweka, 2019).
- Nigeria is characterised by its diversity. While the Nigerian higher education system has massively expanded since Independence, with affirmative action and quota systems, there are still questions about its inclusiveness and policy implementation (Abdulkareem & Muraina,

2014; Adeyemi & Akpotu, 2004; Agbaire, 2018; Odejide, 2003). There are three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo) with approximately 250 other ethnic groups, and a North (largely Muslim)–South (largely Christian) divide. This division is noticeable in access to higher education as illustrated below in Figure 3. The poorest access rate is observed in the North-East (4.71%) and North-West (6.46%), where the dominant majority ethnic group (Hausa/Fulani) are farmers and animal rearers (Igbineweka, 2019).

Figure 3: Regional Gaps in University Access Rates in Nigeria



Source: Agbaire, 2018

- Nigeria is a class-bound society. Research has reported that, regardless of region, basic education enrolment as well as entry to higher education is largely dependent on parents' socio-economic status (Kazeem et al., 2010).
- Between 1966 and 1999, the army held power in Nigeria, apart from a short-lived return to democracy between 1979 to 1983. Prolonged military rule affected Nigerian universities and eroded their autonomy. Student protest has been rife in Nigeria – in response to:
 - quality issues such as the poor university infrastructure, including overcrowded lecture and residential halls, and
 - state action and political repression.
- Clashes have often been violent, resulting in loss of life, and have also been highly disruptive to academic life – often because they have been mismanaged by university leadership (Akintola, 2010).
- Cultism is a major problem in Nigerian universities (Morley et al., 2006; Oyibo, 2020). These campus cults are secret societies which are banned in Nigeria, and hundreds of members have been arrested and prosecuted over the years. However, they continue to operate on university campuses, and still attract new members. They often involve gang warfare, violent initiation rites, and gender-based violence. Cults have been accused of being behind serious campus

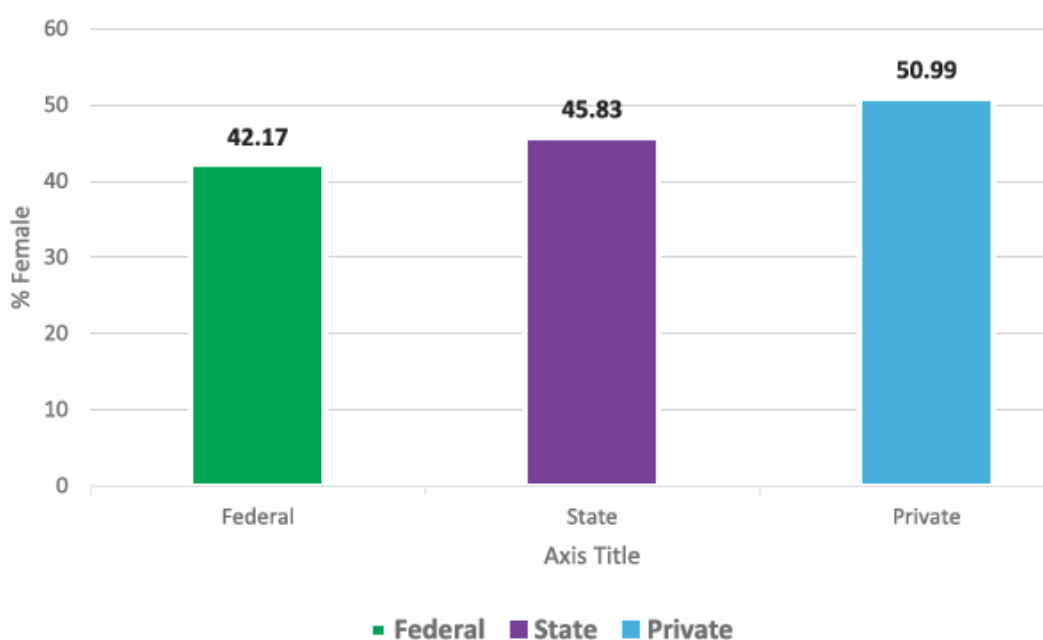
violence, including killings, at universities, and sometimes harassing lecturers for good grades. Cult violence on campuses was at its worse in the 1980s and 1990s, when Nigeria witnessed numerous coups. Some students have quit their studies to escape the grip of the cults, and the violence and virility culture of the cults creates a lack of safety for women students.

- **Current challenges in Nigeria’s higher education system include:**
 1. The demand for higher education exceeds the capacity, e.g. staffing shortages and high student/staff ratios; lack of highly qualified lecturers
 2. Insufficient investment in infrastructure, e.g. IT, student accommodation
 3. Mismatch between the university curriculum and the needs of the labour market
 4. The need to develop research cultures
 5. Quality assurance in the context of unregulated expansion
 6. Civil unrest, including strikes, conflicts, disruption of the academic calendar and cultism
 7. Gender inequality, gender-based violence including sexual harassment
 8. Most socio-economically disadvantaged communities not accessing higher education despite affirmative action/quota systems

ENROLMENT IN UNDER- AND POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

- Between 2015 and 2018, the annual growth in enrolment rose 12% from an average of 8% in previous years (NUC, 2019). This increase can be attributed to the opening of the National Open University in Nigeria, the approval of distance learning centres for conventional universities, and the increase in the total number of universities (NUC, 2019).
- By 2018, the overall enrolment (undergraduate and postgraduate) for 98% of the universities in the system that provided enrolment data stood at 2,041,291 students enrolled – a very low number for a population of over 200 million.
- There has been considerable international investment in gender equality in Nigerian universities. For example, in 2003, the Carnegie Corporation of New York awarded \$4 million in grants to the University of Jos and Obafemi Awolowo University, two of Nigeria's leading institutions of higher education. The funding included a focus on gender mainstreaming, gender sensitisation of staff, and the development of gender and women’s studies (Morley, 2006; Morley et al., 2006). However, men continue to enrol in Nigerian universities at a higher rate than women (Oludayo et al., 2019).
- A breakdown of enrolment data by gender reveals that in the academic year 2018, female students constituted 44% of the total undergraduate enrolment, i.e. 788,349 of the total of 1,798,958. The highest concentration of female enrolment in undergraduate studies is at private universities as compared to federal and state universities.

Figure 4: Percentage of Females in Undergraduate Studies across Universities



Source: NUC, 2019

- Data suggest that the National Open University in Nigeria has the highest rate of women undergraduate students. This could be because distance learning is more accessible for women.
- The private Madonna University, Okija, hosts the highest number of enrolled female undergraduate students. According to the latest data of 2018, the total number of student population enrolled in postgraduate studies in Nigeria was 242,333, and women constituted 92,014 (38%) of the total (NUC, 2019). Note, however, that these data were collected from 157 universities only, highlighting some of the challenges of data collection in Nigeria. Private higher education can offer opportunities to students who have been unable to access state-funded universities, and are willing to pay for their education.
- The total number of enrolled PhD students in 2018 was 25,712 across 157 universities (NUC, 2019). Female students in PhD programs constituted 8,841 (34.38%) of the total (NUC, 2019). For more detailed information about which universities offer PhDs, please see <https://www.nuc.edu.ng/approved-universities-to-run-postgraduate-programmes/>
- Women are beginning to enrol in higher numbers in Nigerian universities but are still under-represented in the STEM subjects (Aderemi et al., 2013). In 2018, 27% of students enrolled in STEM subjects were females. This signals a 4% increase on figures reported in 2017 (NUC, 2019).
- Female students often express interest in STEM careers, as they witness the material benefits for those working in the Nigerian oil and gas industries, for example. However, there is still social prejudice about the suitability of working conditions for women in the field of engineering (Morley et al, 2006). Okeke (2019 n.p.) suggested that ‘there is need to address the

striking fact that lack of funding and facilities needed for innovative research work is very far out of reach from women and girls. Scholarships for women and sponsorship for female scientists are extremely rare, suggesting that more should be instituted’.

- Like other countries in the Global South, Nigeria has in recent years sought to ensure equitable access to education for all, and girls’ access to education has received considerable policy attention. Ekine (2013) argued that far less attention has been paid in Nigeria to the quality of children’s learning and to girls’ participation in the STEM subjects. Adeboyejo (2018) discussed how organisations that are facilitating the entry of women into STEM are often found in civil society rather than in universities.

Table 2: Top 20 Federal Universities in Percentage of Females in Science-based Disciplines

S/N	University	Percentage Female in Science
1.	Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi	100
2.	Federal University of Technology, Owerri	100
3.	Federal University Gashua	82
4.	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	47
5.	Nigerian Army University, Biu	46.26
6.	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike	43.78
7.	University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt	42
8.	Federal University Birnin Kebbi	36.2
9.	Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	36.2
10.	Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu Alike	30
11.	Federal University Gusau	29
12.	Federal University of Technology, Akure	27.9
13.	University of Jos, Jos	27
14.	University of Ilorin, Ilorin	26
15.	Federal University of Technology, Minna	25
16.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	24.8
17.	University of Calabar, Calabar	24
18.	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	24
19.	Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola	23
20.	Federal University Dutse	22.2

Source: NUC, 2019

Table 3: Top 20 State Universities on the Measure of Percentage of Females in Science-based Disciplines

1.	Ignatius Ajuru University of Education	60.2
2.	Abia State University, Uturu	60
3.	University of Medical Sciences, Ondo City	59.2
4.	Akwa Ibom State University	56.8

5.	Bayelsa Medical University	54
6.	Imo State University Owerri	51.6
7.	Niger Delta University	49.8
8.	Kwara State University, Malete	40
9.	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	40
10.	Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti	39
11.	First Technical University, Ibadan	37.3
12.	Taraba State University	36.26
13.	Ondo State University of Science and Technology, Okitipupa	36.1
14.	Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University	36
15.	Rivers State University	35.2
16.	Lagos State University, Ojo	34
17.	Edo University Iyamho	33.8
18.	University of Africa, Toru-Orua	32
19.	Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli.	26.68
20.	Delta State University, Abraka	25

Source: NUC, 2019

Table 4: Top 20 Private Universities in Percentage of Female in Science-based Disciplines

S/N	University	Percentage Female in Science
1.	Achievers University, Owo	72
2.	Bowen University, Iwo	69.6
3.	Pamo University of Medical Sciences, Portharcourt	67.79
4.	Eastern Palm University Ogboko	66
5.	Igbinedion University, Okada	65
6.	Madonna University, Nigeria	62.8
7.	Oduduwa University, Ipetumodu	61.9
8.	Clifford University	53.45
9.	University of Mkar, Mkar	53.1
10.	Hallmark University, Ijebu-Itele	52.6
11.	Evangel University, Akaeze	50
12.	Rhema University, Nigeria	47.97
13.	Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State	47
14.	Tansian University, Umunya	46
15.	Baze University	44.5
16.	Coal City University, Enugu	42
17.	Crown-Hill University	40.6
18.	Precious Cornerstone University, Ibadan	39.2
19.	Mountain Top University	36.9
20.	Bells University of Technology, Ota	34.3

Source: NUC, 2019

RESEARCH CULTURE

- Nigeria's research culture is severely under-developed, and research and development in Nigeria account for only 0.2% of GDP compared with the global average of 1.77%. Africa contributes approximately 1% of the world's research, and Nigeria contributes an even lower percentage.
- Nigerian research has been sustained largely by the efforts of international organisations, e.g. UNICEF, UNESCO, or the World Bank. Only three Nigerian universities are in the top 1000 globally (Covenant University, University of Ibadan, and University of Lagos), and a significant number do not have any specific research centres.
- The level of scholarly contributions from Nigerian universities in top research journals remains significantly low, particularly in the sciences. Contributory factors to the poor research culture in universities are thought to include inadequate infrastructure, disruptive strike actions, and a poor educational system (Stears Business, 2019).
- The most recent UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) data available as of 2020 suggest that the share of female researchers in 2017 in Nigeria was 23.3%, which is lower than the regional average of 31.1% and the global average 30% (UNESCO, 2020b).

WOMEN'S ACADEMIC CAREERS

- Nigeria is ranked 128 out of 153 in the *2020 Global Gender Gap Report* (World Economic Forum, 2020). There is a noticeable lack of gender-disaggregated data on women in Nigerian universities, and the UIS databases have no recent figures for female attainment, graduation or field of study in higher education, for example.
- The 2018 data suggest that the total number of teaching staff across 157 universities in Nigeria reached 67,680, of which women constituted 23.65% (16,009) (NUC, 2019). The total number of full-time professors was 10,237, of which the number of female professors was 1,575 (15.39%) (NUC, 2019).

Table 5: Sample of Women Holding Academic Posts in Nigerian Universities

Name of University	Male	Female
University of Ilorin	88.4%	11.6%
University of Nigeria, Nsukka	73 %	27 %
Federal University Technology, Owerri	83%	17%
Enugu State University of Technology	66%	34%
Imo State University	87%	13%
University of Ibadan	82%	18%
University of Calabar	82%	18%
University of Port Harcourt	88%	12%
Obafemi Awolowo University	82%	18%

Source: Eboiyehi et al., 2016

- Nigeria has a strong body of feminist scholarship – some of which has turned its analytical gaze onto higher education itself (Mama, 2006; Odejide, 2003, Odejide et al., 2006; Pereira, 2004). The patriarchal nature of Nigerian universities (as elsewhere) is often cited as an explanation for gender inequalities and frictions (Adebayo & Akanle, 2014; Fatoki & Kobiowu, 2015; Morley, 2006; Mukoro, 2014; Odejide, 2003, Odejide et al., 2006; Olaogun et al., 2015; Oti, 2013). The topic of sexual harassment and gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria's universities is widely reported (Iliyasu et al, 2011; Ogunbameru, 2006; Okumdi Muoghalu & Iyabode Olaoye, 2016; Omonijo et al., 2013; Pereira, 2004; Saraki, 2016; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2016).
- Studies report how the effects on women (staff and students) who are harassed, often by powerful male academics, include poor academic performance, loss of self-confidence, negative health outcomes and well-being. Bakari and Leach (2007: 85) reported how the absence of any national legislation on gender equity or sex discrimination in Nigeria, combined with weak enforcement of existing policies and procedures intended to ensure equal opportunity, allowed male members of universities to 'engage with impunity in discriminatory practices against both female staff and students'.

- There is a noticeable gender gap witnessed in leadership, with women constituting below 17% of the total number of university leaders (NUC, 2019). This group comprises: Chancellors, Pro-Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Bursars, and Head University Librarians. There are some variations in private universities, e.g. Chairs of the Board of Trustees/Regents to which the council reports.
- A breakdown by university type showed that, in 2018, federal universities had the highest rate of female principal officers (19.16%); the rate at private universities was 18.11%, and the lowest rate (14%) was across state universities (NUC, 2019). In terms of leadership, there were 11 female vice-chancellors in Nigeria in 2018.

INTERNATIONALISATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- The National Universities Commission (NUC) has begun encouraging and facilitating discussions between Nigerian universities and their international counterparts. Many local, foreign and multilateral institutions have also begun to partner with Nigerian universities and, in some cases, have funded targeted research in areas such as: science, technology, research, engineering, agriculture and mathematics (referred to as STREAM), as well as medicine, energy, water and food security, climate change and sustainable environmental development (British Council, 2018).
- Data gathered in a British Council study (2018) report that of 143 accredited universities, 45 (representing 31.9%) had existing trans-national education (TNE) relationships with foreign institutions. However, of the 31.9% existing TNE partnerships, less than 30% of these partnerships were active, and an even smaller number had successfully achieved their partnership's goals. There appear to be low levels of awareness among the faculty and student body of Nigerian institutions about existing TNE partnerships and available opportunities including faculty- and student-exchange programmes.

PATTERNS OF MOBILITY

- University students in Sub-Saharan Africa have become the most mobile tertiary students in the world, as about 5% of the 8.1 million tertiary students on the continent have crossed a border to study, as compared to the global average of 2.4% (Kigotho, 2020). Nigeria sends the most students overseas of any country on the African continent, and outbound mobility numbers are growing at a rapid pace. The number of Nigerian students abroad increased by 164% in the decade between 2005 and 2015 alone – from 26,997 to 71,351. By 2020, the total number of Nigerian students abroad was 76,338 (UNESCO, 2020a).

Figure 5: Number of Outbound Nigerian Students between 1996 and 2015



Source 1: World Education Services, 2017

- Nigerian students in recent years have been increasingly studying in countries on the African continent itself, e.g. in Ghana. As many as 40% of Nigerian overseas students traditionally relied on scholarships, many of which were backed by oil and gas revenues. These scholarships have been scaled back in the context of the fiscal crisis (ICEF, 2016).

Table 6: Outbound Internationally Mobile Tertiary Students Studying Abroad, all Countries, Both Sexes (number)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Outbound internationally mobile tertiary students studying abroad, all countries, both sexes (number)	79,467	92,548	96,702	85,925	76,338

Source: UNESCO, 2020a

Table 7: Top 5 Study Destinations for Outward Mobility

Destination	United States	United Kingdom	Canada	Malaysia	Ghana
Total	12,761	10,524	7,082	4,661	3,959

Source: UNESCO, 2020a

- Nigeria's colonial ties and shared language with the United Kingdom means that it is the second most popular destination after the USA, and approximately 10,524 Nigerian students studied in the UK in 2015. Malaysia is rapidly becoming a popular destination for Muslim students from Northern Nigeria, and there were 4,661 Nigerian students studying there in 2020; 1,593 Nigerian students studied in Germany in the same period (UNESCO, 2020a).

CURRENT DEBATES ON GENDER AND INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

- Questions have been posed about how gender relates to opportunities and experiences of internationalisation (Morley et al., 2019, 2020). Mobility is seen as vital in an academic's career because it provides scholars with opportunities for interaction with other scholars internationally and for further professional development.
- Opportunities can be highly gendered – especially in Africa (Prozesky & Beaudry, 2019). Internationalisation makes visible the patriarchal premium (Bhandari, 2017; Jöns, 2011; Matus and Talburt, 2009; Myers and Griffin, 2018; Rosner, 2015).
- Leemann (2010) suggested that mobility is not viewed as a social experience whose value is neutral, but as something that has value precisely because it can be drawn into fields of asymmetrical gendered relations. She argued that women academics are less geographically mobile than their male counterparts, and that greater geographic immobility can put women at a disadvantage with regard to tenure.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

- Data on government spending on tertiary education and research and development remain absent. Despite the availability of data on sources of funding and running costs, they do not specifically indicate the exact annual amount.
- Data on the total number of personnel in research and development remain absent, although the share of females in research positions was reported by UIS and is included in the report. However, the most recent data are for 2017.
- Many of the claims and statistics – even in formal documentation – are inaccurate and inconsistent, e.g. destination countries for Nigerian students.
- There are major data gaps in relation to higher education in general, and specifically in relation to gender. For example, UIS does not have recent figures for Nigeria, and the higher education data that do exist – e.g. on student mobility – are rarely gender-disaggregated.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Women are under-represented as academic leaders, teachers, students, and researchers in Nigerian universities. There is a strong academic feminist movement in Nigeria, and some scholars have turned their analytical gaze onto the academy itself. However, many studies of gender and higher education in Nigeria are often small-scale, lone inquiries, with limited data and policy impact.
- Sexual harassment is widely reported in Nigerian universities. This has a major impact on the safety and well-being of (mainly) women students and staff.
- There are initiatives to encourage girls and women to enter the STEM fields, and these are often provided by NGOs and philanthropy.
- Gender needs to be intersected with other structures of inequality, including ethnicity and socio-economic status, as there is considerable diversity and poverty in Nigeria's population, and this severely impacts on higher education participation.
- While there have been affirmative action and quota systems for students, the implementation in federal universities is poor. Some of the most socio-economically deprived communities remain outside the higher education system. Less attention has been paid to affirmative action for female staff.
- Nigeria's colonial heritage means that students tend to prefer mobility to Anglophone countries, such as the USA, the UK, and Canada. Muslim students are increasingly attracted to studying in Malaysia. Countries on the African continent, such as Ghana and South Africa, are gaining popularity. Germany is currently the 12th most popular destination. This is largely related to the lack of prominence of the German language in Nigeria's education system.

- Nigeria has embarked on a programme of internationalisation of its higher education system, with a range of trans-national education (TNE) agreements, for example. However, these are not always active, or well-publicised among students and staff. There is an absence of gender-disaggregated data on internationalisation.
- Nigeria's higher education system has expanded but is still inadequate for the growing demands of a huge population. The system is under-resourced, raising questions about quality and standards.
- Nigeria's research culture is under-developed, with a low publication rate, a low number of university research centres, and poor opportunities for women's career advancement as researchers.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE HUMBOLDT FOUNDATION

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

- As poverty and maldistribution of higher educational opportunities – especially across different geographical regions – continue to be major challenges in Nigeria, Humboldt programmes could be developed to encourage participation of Nigerian women scientists from socio-economically disadvantaged regions.

WOMEN IN STEM

- The Humboldt Foundation could be encouraged to make links/sponsor programmes for academic women to research initiatives with girls and women to promote their entry into STEM.

PUBLICITY

- Information about opportunities provided by the Humboldt Foundation need to be widely publicised among students and staff in Nigerian universities, and possibly linked to addressing some of the major social problems in Nigeria, e.g. poverty.

LANGUAGE

- As English is the main foreign language spoken in Nigeria, language support will be important for participation in the Humboldt Programme.

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