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Gender Differentials in the Agricultural Specialization in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Studies have revealed gender differences in aspirations, performance, career choices, and specialization. These differences are much so openly glaring in a developing nation like Nigeria. The new millennium has brought about varied technological innovations and changes such as the internet which has imparted cultures and perceptions across societies. More women are going into specializations such as agricultural sciences hitherto regarded as a masculine field, and are performing in outstanding ways in such hitherto regarded as masculine fields. This survey study was carried out in a central Nigerian University as a case study to check the gender differences in university output in the Nigerian agricultural field.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are important processes in the formulation of career concepts, optimums, and attainments. These processes are not only functions of mental or cognitive processes. Also inclusive are the socialization process and the hidden curriculum.

There are important psychological processes involved in socialization. Such processes turn many women into advocates of the home and family "destiny". Rogers in Mowaiye (1993) believed that women have been carefully trained for this and are repeatedly told that it represents the best that life can offer. With such training, educational attainments and aspirations can be curtailed especially in fields and specializations perceived to be masculine or male domains. However, education liberates the mind and thus causes changes in the role expectations of people. Mowaiye (1995, 1997) reported low female participation in science-based fields at the lower and higher education levels to end the tendency of females to have a high level of fear of success syndrome. A further study (Mowaye, 1997) revealed a slight change in the level of female participation in higher education. A persistent study may pinpoint efforts needed to pull the female manpower to national participation.

Women are said to tend to primarily rely on good social relationships as a source of determining self-worth, while men may depend on accomplishment (O'Leary, 1974). This influences desires, educational goals, and aspirations. Specific "task" and goal-directed actions are necessary to bring a desire to fruition. Achievement results through a desire to do well on a particular task, through the willingness of a person to be persistent on such task no matter the complexity and difficulty level of the task. Conflict dynamics can inhibit this (Mowaiye, 1994; Mowaiye, 1995). Women are believed generally, not to be oriented towards achievement or success outside the home. As much as possible, they avoid "achieving" or 'succeeding" because of the notion that it is "unfeminine" to do so. Males are more achievement-oriented than females. By the adolescent period, girls are attuned to the negative consequences of academic and occupational attainment. And, therein, lies what has been termed fear of success.

The tendency to avoid success is a tendency that inhibits achievement-directed behavior as a result of concerns about the negative consequences of success (Horner, 1972). Fear of success thus leads to performance inhibition. Women more than men are more likely to associate negative consequences with femininity. In light of this point, a bright and intelligent young woman whose aspiration is to be an attorney may instead settle for a career as a legal secretary because of fear that success as an attorney may reduce her chances to be seen as a desirable woman and wife. It went on to say that many achievements are oriented women, especially those high in the action to avoid success when faced with the conflict between their abilities and interest, compromise by disguising their abilities, and abdicating from competition in the outside world. Inhibitions limit goals, efforts, and attainment. However, with global changes and more positive achievements and the orientation of women, finding out gender differences vis-à-vis areas of specialization among university graduates in Nigeria is desirous. Population explosion in Nigeria and with higher literacy levels has seen more females attaining university degrees and going into areas hitherto regarded as male domains. The study aimed to see what changes there are among university graduates and the University of Ilorin was used as a case study.

2. METHODS

The University of Ilorin was purposively chosen because of its strategic location, as a middle state between the north and the south of Nigeria, population, and is a federal university that

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attracts students from all over the country for its low fees. The University data was gathered for analysis purposes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis is presented in summary table form is presented on **Table 1**. As **Table 1** revealed, the Faculty of Agriculture had a high no of females with an N of 119, and the males had an N of 268, which is quite high for the females in a society that is majorly agricultural and in which the males are the major participant. And in a field like agricultural science females tended to avoid like a plague in the past, the high number of graduating females in the field is quite revealing. And it does show that societal perception is changing gradually The Faculty of Arts which is often perceived to house courses that are assumed to be feminine had a high output of 305 female students and 494 male students.

From **Table 1**, it could be observed that the Science Faculty and Engineering and Technology Faculty had the poorest number of female graduates of all the faculties, with a figure of 30 and 36 in number respectively. The Faculty of Business and Social Sciences has a total of 738 students, where 331 are females. Basic Medical Sciences had almost half of its graduates being females (F/62; M/129). Communication and Information Faculty also had a substantial number of female graduates who constituted also, almost half of the Faculty graduates (F/91; M//219), Law faculty had a little over half of its graduates being females (F/88; M/159). Two faculties that had a dismal outing of female graduates as noted were the Faculties of Science, (F/36; M/126) and Engineering and Technology (F/30; M//287). Faculty of Engineering and Technology as observed was particularly pathetic in female ratio to the males. Faculties of Education and Agriculture got close to having almost half of its graduates as females. A trend observed is that Clinical Science Faculty has a poor number of female graduates compared to the number of male graduates.

Table 1. First degree/diploma for2010-2011 academic session.

Faculty	Males	Females
Agriculture	268	119
Arts	494	305
Basic medical sciences	129	62
Business and social sciences	738	331
Communication and information science	219	91
Education	506	211
Institute of education	758	434
Engineering and technology	287	30
Law	159	88
Science	126	36

The same trend was also observed goes for the Engineering faculty. Some so-called “masculine” faculties like Basic Medical Sciences had a higher number of females to males. The same goes for the faculty of Agriculture. The faculty of Arts had a higher number of graduates compared to males. There was a general improvement in the number of females across faculties in recent times. In the 2010/2011 academic session, the career stereotype seems to be the trend with the number of graduates in varied faculties except for the. The faculty of Agriculture had quite a high no of females. It was one interesting observation with the high number of females graduating in the faculty of Agriculture, a hitherto assumed course for men. One factor that could be responsible could be that the rigid societal gender fixation is breaking down. And the belief that females cannot go into a field like agriculture

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because it is reserved for males no longer holds. The impact of 21st-century social media use such as the internet could be a factor in the change.

The improvement in the number across faculties especially when the ratio is compared to males though cannot be said to be the same in the faculties of Science and Engineering and Technology. The ratio of females to males was low. Engineering and Technology seem to be an area where females are yet to delve into compared to other science areas of study. This is worth noting for stakeholders. The role of the engineering and technology area cannot be underestimated in development. And it cannot be that more females cannot be found with a flair for this course, which begs the question of why there are so few of them there. Efforts must be made to not leave out female manpower in this important sector. This is essential for national development, and the engineering and technology sector cannot be glossed over in the task of fast-tracking development.

4. CONCLUSION

Studies have shown that aspirations, performance, job preferences, and specialty vary by gender. These distinctions are particularly obvious in a developing country like Nigeria. The internet, which has influenced cultures and views across societies, is just one example of the numerous technological breakthroughs and transformations that the new millennium has brought about. More women are choosing to specialize in disciplines like agricultural sciences, which were formerly thought to be more male, and they are excelling in these fields. To examine the gender differences in university output in the Nigerian agriculture sector, a survey study was conducted in a major institution in Nigeria.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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