

SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF FEMALE ACADEMIC STAFF IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Female in higher position of management is limited in relation to the number of able female labour force in Nigeria. It was further learnt that even the Nigerian education institutions is in dear needs of making female academic staff to higher ranks to bridge the protracted gender gap and male dominance in the country's higher institutions. In the quest to address this challenge, this study adopted qualitative method and interviewed six women that are occupying higher ranks in the Nigerian universities. Data collected for the study was thematically analyzed with NVIVO 10 software. The study found that socio-cultural factors such as patriarchy, domestic chores, role stereotypes, early marriage and gender discrimination serve as barriers of career advancement of female staff in Nigeria universities. It is recommended that Nigerian policy makers should introduce social reorientation programmes that would improve female capability and career advancement in the universities.

Keywords: *Socio-cultural, Career Advancement, Academic Staff, Nigerian Universities*

Introduction

The World over, females' participation in formal labour force sector is increasing, specifically in 2009 to 2014 in different nations and regions of the globe (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2015). Although, there is an increase in female entry into formal sector, but the participation is minimal and in dawdling speed, particularly in Nigeria. However, despite abundant human resource of the country of about 180 million people (51% males and 49% female) and working age bracket of 53.6 percent (CIA World Factbook, 2015). However, the rate of female entry to higher position

of management is disheartening compare to the available female work force in the country (ILO, 2015). In this regards, Olabisi (2014) and Duyilemi (2007) further lamented that even the Nigerian education institutions show less concern to the needs of making female academic staff to higher positions. Thus, this persisted challenges has created a gender gap and male dominance in the nation's higher institutions. Nevertheless, teaching is a compatible professions of female gender because of it nurturing, modest and compassion nature (Hofstede, 2011). Therefore, the female academicians will be more motivated and productive in teaching, research and community in the higher institutions if given opportunity, particularly in the higher positions (Hassan, Baharom and Abdul Mutalib, 2017). Though, some females have achieved certain higher positions, but they are limited in number, and larger population of females' lecturers are restricted from getting to the top due to the "glass ceiling" syndrome (Ejumudo, 2013). Hence, this study explores the barriers that need to be removed for female career advancement. To achieve this objective the study seeks the perception of some female academic staff who had achieve some objective career success so that others female academic staff can know certain expected barriers to be removed for their career advancement.

Literature Review

Barriers to career advancement are referring to as conditions or actions that make it difficult for career progression to occur (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard & Newman, 2016; Kalpazidou Schmidt & Faber, 2016; Tharshini et al., 2016). Many factors hinder female career advancement. Nguyen (2013) opined that the barriers to female academic staff career advancement concerning Vietnam are the gender stereotypes, pressing family obligations, lack of aspiration of female staff to occupy management positions among others. Similarly, Lapieree and Zimmerman (2012) have argued that females are not at the top of affairs or management positions due to their lack of aspiration to such position of management. This assertion has dusted and raises debate on whether the lack of advancement is because of structural obstacles or gender discrimination barrier or due to female self-choice of action to avoid advancement to the top of affairs (Broadbridge and Simpson, 2011; Canal-Deminguez, 2014; Tliass & Kauser, 2011). In another development, Sidani et al. (2015) asserted that in the developing countries, particularly the Anglo-Saxon culture has hindered female employees due to

the patriarchal system; favouring of men over female, gender stereotype in the role of nurturing to females were compounding factors hindering female career advancement. However, family support, self-effort, and luck are the facilitating factors of career advancement of female academic staff of higher education in Vietnam.

In this vein, Yusuff (2014) examine the gender factor and career advancement in Nigeria and an increase of female academic staff with Ph.D.qualification, yet they are restricted by organizational barriers that limit their reaching higher level of career advancement. The finding of the study further revealed that gender stereotypes is not only a factor or barrier to female career advancement in Nigerian academic, but also organizational procedure and social factor which had hindered female to occupy higher positions. However, despites this plight, an area of study that receives less attention on career development is that deal with variables that serves as obstacles to a currently serving personnel with a “function-specific role” such as lecturing to get higher easily into the next level (Barnett, 2015). Function-specific role (lecturing) of academic staff career advancement has been under-researched in the scholarly area of career studies and HRD (Barnett, 2015; Baruch, Dany & Davense, 2014; Van der Klink, Van der Heijden & Williams van Rooij, 2014).

Similarly, Beinomugisha, Kamyia and Said (2014) found no relationship between the level of ability of female and their career advancement; rather it was gender stereotype and social-role factors that stand as barriers to their representation in the higher level of academic and administrative status in Uganda. The scholars further suggested for an effort by the university in supporting female to further postgraduate studies, seminar, conferences and article publications without discrimination so as to give them requisite for advancement in the system.

However, Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2014) argued that organizational factors such as male-dominated networks, harassment, and intimidation, temporary work agreement as well as individual factors like lack of self-confidence influence female career advancement to senior positions in science and technology in the United Kingdom (UK) universities. Also, Posholi (2013) argued that lack of confidence among women, society

criticism, fear of disapproval and lack of competence deter female career advancement in Lesotho. Zong, Couch and Blum (2011) further opined that female perceived lack of promotion, pay, and training, family responsibilities conflict affect career advancement. However, female that had been mentored are less affected by those barriers than those who are not mentored (Posholi, 2012).

Furthermore, females' were challenged by gender role, work-family commitment, the stereotype of women as managers, male-dominated environment, organizational structure, glass ceiling, job characteristics, lack of support system, gender discrimination, sexual harassment and lack of mentoring and coaching in Lesotho. Studies of full time and part time employees in National health Scheme Trust in London found that the attitude of men toward the domestic division of labour and child nursing in favour of men must be changed in favour of both sexes so that they meaningfully compete on an equal basis in their organization. If not, women would continue to be seen at lower and middle cadre. While, men occupy higher echelon of their career (Whittock, Edwards, McLaren and Robinson, 2002). And this is the resultant effect of female under-representation at a higher level in the workplace. Similarly, Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) examine barriers to career progression of women in higher positions in the multi-national company in Malaysia based on gender role theory; the study found that female commitment to their family and family structure were highly serving as barriers to female managers in all higher positions in Oil Company in Malaysia. In a similar vein, Mohammed, Manaf & Misnan (2015) argued that lack of mentoring hindered female's entrepreneurial development in Malaysia. Shrestha (2016) meta-analyzed past literature and concluded that women were barred to a higher level of their career due to work-family challenges, inequality in opportunities, lack of family support and gender discrimination.

Method

This study adopted qualitative method through interview technique in data collection. While, purposive sampling technique was employed in the selection of six female academic staff in both federal and state universities in Nigeria. The familiarity of the researchers to research environment motivated the adoption of purposive sampling because the researchers know

the appropriate samples to generate data (Hassan, Baharom & Abdul Mutalib, 2016). These selected respondents had in one time got advancement in their career either through salary increase or upward adjustment in status. Lastly, NVivo 10 was used for data analysis based on thematic analysis of the responses and content analysis was further used for discussion.

Results

Based on the themes that emerged from the analysis. The themes generated were categorized into other sub-themes. These sub-themes that were generated are discussed in relations to the respondents' original narrations. The narrations as earlier stated are reported in the original words of the interviewees. Thus, this serves as an avenue to achieve the stated objective through the subjective and the in-depth opinion of the interviewees as the details are presented below. Based on the model, the generated themes from the interviews that serve as remedies to barriers of career advancement of female academic staff in the Nigerian universities are patriarchy, domestic chores, role stereotypes, early marriage and gender discrimination.

Socio-cultural barrier

Nguyen (2013) defined socio-cultural barriers as those entrenched hegemonic cultural traditions of a society or country that female are generally ought to follow. Previous studies have shown that female, specifically those in traditional societies are expected to be bounded by those traditions without question. In this study, socio-cultural factors that made up of the barrier are patriarchy, domestic chores, role stereotypes, early marriage and gender discrimination. Figure 1 below shows the graphical representation of socio-cultural barriers.

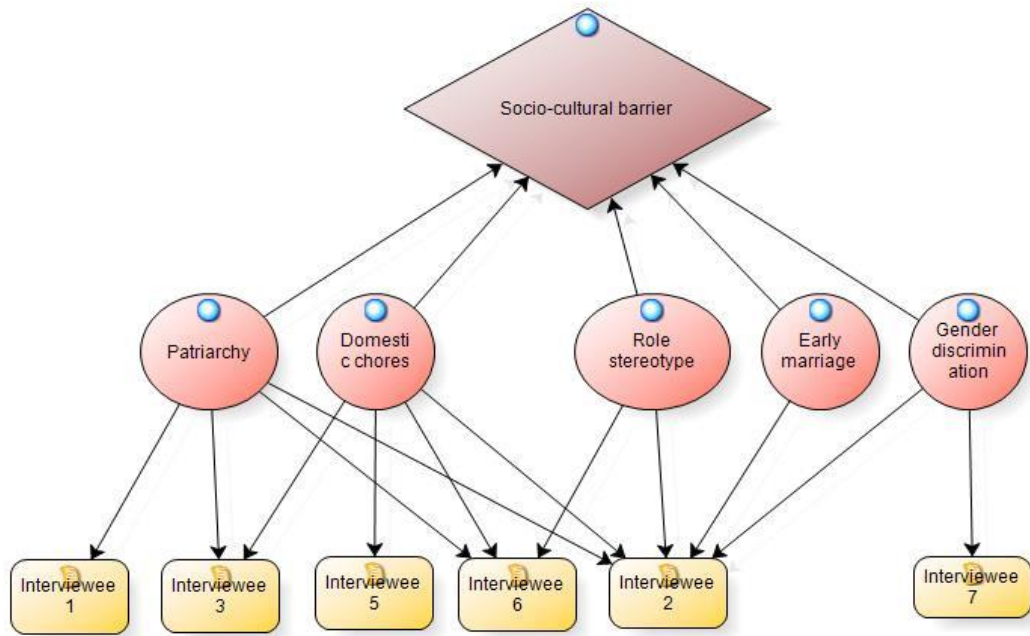


Figure 1
Qualitative model of Socio-cultural barrier of career advancement of female academic staff

Domestic chores

In a traditional society such as Nigeria, the females are required to do domestic work; such role and responsibility have been reported to be a barrier in academic career development for females (Neale & Ozkanli, 2010). This burden of family responsibilities has caused and continuing to affect female academic staff career advancement (Ngumen, 2013). Due to this existing extant fact, one of the interviewee had lamented below;

Family structure to some extent affected me because as a female lecturer, still you have your own children to take care of, husband to take care of. So you wouldn't neglect that for your job or the sake of your job. And in these days where increasingly the house-helpers' are not people you would rely on completely. Your house chores begin to compete with your work, but that is on the one hand. On the other hand also, if women have haven't swiftly advance like their male counterpart; it has it root on the societal factor than within the academia itself (Head of Department1).

Another interviewee similarly responded that; “we do similar work (office work) with men and also women are burdened with work of home and family” (Director of Institute).

A complementary view by another interviewee opined that;

I face some challenges like; firstly, by the time I was married so I have to cope with family work; house chores and I have to attend lectures, write thesis all at the same time and then bear children. So, I delivered (gave birth) during that period too, so challenges cannot be explained in such a way that..., is only those that went through the situation can be able understood the experience and the situation. So despite that, Another problem or challenges am facing now is that I want to sit down with my kids, I want to have time with my kids; with my family but our time is not corresponding because the time they would be off from school, it's the time I will be in my working place. And in terms of household work, I have to do some before I go out of the house and after close I have to go back and continue with the household chore. It sometimes stressful because the work here (university) is too much and sometimes I have to go home and face so many responsibilities that I must take care of them (Coordinator2).

In another emphatic response from a another respondent is that domestic responsibility is a barrier to career advancement as thus lamented;

... Very challenging and time consuming and the womenfolk in Nigeria are people that are always considered to be 50% of her life should be with her family members like her kids and her husband. So the time for her to dedicate into the academic study to run into a PhD or achieve professorship is not there (Coordinator 2).

Looking at the submissions above from the respondents, it is glaring that domestic chores affects the career advancement the female academic staff. If their responses are something of consideration, it is pertinent to assert that a domestic chore due to the socio-cultural factor in the Nigerian society in general and universities in particular has affected female career advancement.

Early marriage

Due to the traditional society of Nigeria, some girls' are marrying at their tender age because of socio-cultural belief and this has been reported to

affect their future career. In this regards, an interviewee shared her experience about early marriage as it's hinders career advancement of female academic staff. "Early marriage; in some culture the girl child has to marry early and they are many and if the husbands do not permit them to go to school they stop there" (Head of Department1).

Based on the above expression, we can draw a point here that early marriage of Nigerian girls' child has served as a detrimental factor to the opportunity and advancement of females in the Nigerian society in general and it specific effects to women efficacy in education and university leadership.

Gender discrimination

The status of men and female are segregated in the Nigerian society which has also transcended to the university practice due to the male dominance in the profession. The discrimination made men to dominate the university positions. This further explains the Nigerian university where men are discriminated as born leader against women. This socio-cultural barrier of gender discrimination of female academic staff in Nigeria has received the attention of Ohia and Nzewi (2016) as reported as;

"The structures put in place to regulate the activities of men and women in Nigeria condition the programming of the mind of members of the society to the extent that the resulting subordination of women seems normal and acceptable, even to women themselves. With the changing policies and consequent emphasis on female education, the ground is shifting as many women have delved into the hitherto male domains and this includes Academics, but then, women still have to pass some socio-cultural huddles to be able to attain a meaningful level of growth in their chosen career" (Ohia & Nzewi, 2016).

Taking the above assertion in consideration, a female academic staff from a Federal University has opined that the socio-cultural barrier of gender discrimination as its affect the career advancement of female academic staff. *I look at it as the orientation that is being given, even if is not spoken, in a very subtle way, even in the career choice that a girl child would have to pick. Men would always like women, perhaps to remain in the private sphere* (Head of Department1).

Also, another interviewee revealed that belief system has helped the promotion of gender discrimination in the Nigerian society as a whole and Nigerian university in particular which has affected the career prospect of female gender in the Nigerian university. In specific term, a female academic staff from a Federal University has lamented that;

Personally, segregation due to religion and culture are hindrance to career advancement in some societies of Nigeria; because parents would not like their female children to mingle with male children so also as workers. However, mentoring is a beneficial factor for female career advancement, though religion and culture restrict some workers from association with other sex and female sex mentor are limited in number in Nigeria. By the fact that you are married, women in Nigerian culture and considering your religion may not permit you to mingle with your male colleagues in the way that you should. Though not all women have this barrier, but some have. If my male colleague call me that there is a paper he want us to look at, and it happens to be from that part of the countryor that religion that limit my mingling with male whether they are colleagues or not, I would have lost out from giving that edge of the paper. Now, being married from that culture and religion would inhibit you benefiting from mentoring and network group. Be it male or female, it is a double edge sword because the man is also careful relating with you, even if he wants to help you because he wouldn't like to be accused of having affairs with you outside academic (Head of Department1).

In a similar vein, a male labour union official has also confirmed the discriminatory challenge that female academic staff are encountering that hinders or barred them from smoothly developing in their career as he noted as;

I don't think that women have equal opportunity for mentoring in the university. To me it should apply, but is not same applied due to some socio-cultural issues coupled with a numerical disadvantage of limited number of female lecturers to give mentoring to mentees. Even though, the few available ones are really up to the task of mentoring of new female academic staff mentee (Union Representative).

Going by the above submission of the interviewees, it is transparent that socio-cultural factor of gender discrimination has created a barrier to the smooth advancement of female academic staff in the Nigerian universities. Despite the fact that the Nigeria constitution in section 42(1) states that; a citizen of the country of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination. This section is a confirmation that you can go to court to seek for redress in the event of your right violation if as a female your right is encroached and that the constitution as a whole prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (Makama, 2003).

Patriarchy

The term patriarchy refers to a system of male authority in which women are oppressed through the political, social and economic institutions (Makama, 2003). Patriarchy is opined as an unjust social system that justifies the oppression of women (Makama, 2003). Okpe (2005) stressed that patriarchy is a wider system or network of hierarchical organization that goes across political, social, religion, economic, cultural, industrial and financial aspects, under which the greater number of higher positions in society are either controlled or occupied and dominated by men gender. Due to this prevailing system in Nigerian society and its presence in the Nigerian universities; the female academic staffers have been subjected to an untold domination of men in their quest for growing higher in their career. Below is the experience of a female academic and an associate professor in one the Nigerian universities.

From personal experience, I would say the biggest obstacle is the male counterpart or some male counterparts who do not take it kindly for having female as their boss. They can make thing difficult or stressful, make it even more difficult for me to attain the position. I think that is the biggest obstacle. But, especially in the university system would have a problem with some of the males who think a woman shouldn't lead them (Dean of Faculty).

Another female interviewee stressed in an interview on the patriarchal barrier to female career advancement in the Nigerian university.

But again, do you know that the profession (Lecturing) is dominated by men and this inhibits women career development and this has created a subtle rule though not documented, but they inhibit women. Many times even when you, especially when you work where your husband work, people think if you are married to person in the same university; I thought personally because this one is personal to me, I had gone to an interview, ones or twice because somebody somewhere thought that may be climbing on the back of your spouse so they are careful to see if the credentials you carry are yours. Such thing could bring down the woman in the work in an academia. They are not written things, but such things can bring down the woman not necessary because she is not working or doing what she should do and all that (Head of Department).

Also, a female professor sees patriarchy as a hindrance to career advancement in the Nigerian university. This is her expression; *Patriarchal factor has led men to have been at the helm of affairs for a very long time, and I think it will take long time for us (Females) to begin to have that large number of females in academic just for the fact that men have been there before us (females). We will get there with time, but can never be the same. For now, we have more male professors, more male whatever; that have reach to the higher level. So if you are talking of position in the department it would have to go to the males because they are mostly due for the positions (Director of Institute).*

In the same direction with other female academic staff position on the barrier of patriarchy to career advancement, another female academic staff has her take as follows;

... Because of the male dominance, for instance, you are in a department where 80% of them are males so the challenge for the 20% is very tough; that is the female staff and also a female would not want to hold any political position (HOD, Dean or VC) in office because she think is going to add to her task/burden in the office (Coordinator 2).

Therefore, considering the above opinions of the numerous interviews, it can be concluded that patriarchy has remained a stubborn factor to the female career advancement barrier due to the many comments above.

Hence, this socio-political factor asserts a great barrier to the female career advancement in the university system.

Role stereotype

There is subordination in status of females to males as a universal phenomenon. However, it is at variance of degree in nature and extent of subordination across countries. Gender role stereotype has not only led to the duality of femininity and masculinity, but it creates them in a hierarchical level in which female gender is generally considered less valued than the male gender because of the social ascription to the female roles in reproductive domain. This gender stereotype is maintained through low resource allocation to females' human development by the family, society and the state. This factor is reflected in the social indicators which are shown in varying degrees of gender discrimination in education, employment, health, ownership of productive resources and even politics in many countries (Makama, 2003). In line with this socio-cultural barrier to human advancement, one of the interviewees had lamented her experience of gender stereotyping in this regards;

Men would always like women, perhaps, to remain in the private sphere and a story was said of recent past female VC and men try all that they could, some would even make comment that annoy; she is a lady and after all is a theatre artist (Head of Department 1).

The assertion is further supported that;

... that woman work in a particular place with her husband and they (men) would because she is a woman; many times I go out of this office door, people use to jokingly say - what are you doing here around this time and I say Hah!, what shouldn't I be doing here at this time. You should be cooking for my friend, you should be doing this, but a man can equally cook food like a wife. It is only a pregnancy that I can carry that my husband cannot and he is there and I am here. Now you see gender stereotype comes in (Head of Department 1).

In the same direction, the phenomenon of gender stereotype is common and

prevalent in the university system Nigeria as substantiated with this particular case of class leadership of the postgraduates. Below is the narration of the incidence from an interviewee;

There are also environment that a woman must not lead; where I left, my 'class rep' was a male and the assistant was female and the 'Rep' (leader) is a military man. So his organization called back, then the males couldn't allow her (assistant rep) to work as 'Rep' because she is a female – she cannot lead them. So they change her. So in academia, it happens to some extent. If you are from that kind of area where I attended a university meeting and I wanted to ask a question, but, a woman tapped me and said women don't talk here and I said how? Then I said I am not a woman, I am a man. So that things are not fair, but they are applied and you have to accept to just be, because you don't want people to see you as an odd person (Head of Department 1).

Another interviewee shared the same opinion on the hindrance of role stereotype as a barrier to female career advancement as thus revealed below; ... *I think because most especially when you talk about the northern part of the country whereby they sold the idea of women being considered as just limited to the household and I think sometimes is a barrier but some others think we have passed the era of women's plight being considered as a waste of time (Coordinator 2).*

Therefore, with considerations to wide negative experience shared by interviews above, it is pertinent to understand that role stereotype has become socio-cultural barrier to the plight and career advancement of female academic staff in the Nigerian universities.

Discussion

Socio-cultural factor through patriarchy, domestic chores, early marriage, role-stereotype and gender discrimination affect career advancement of female academic staff in Nigeria. This outcome is not amazing considering the traditional nature of African society where culture and tradition, rather than free wills determine the lives of Africans. In particularly, women are naturally perceived as subordinate to men. This is in congruent to interview result; some female lecturers see patriarchal system of Nigerian society as a hindrance to career advancement of female academic staff in the Nigerian university. Taking this prevailing system in public sector at large and the

Nigerian universities in particular; the female academic staff have been hindered to achieve speedy career advancement (Makama, 2003; Okpe, 2005). This patriarchal system has made male to perceive higher position of organization as an exclusive opportunity for male alone. Men see themselves as legitimate owner of management positions in organization and any attempt to check this status quo come with frown face (Broadbridge, 2008). Furthermore, patriarchal system promoted role stereotype in the Nigerian societies, where female are tagged to remain in private affairs or at least at the lower positions of any organization. This gender stereotype is maintained through low resource allocation to females' human development by the family, society and the state (Makama, 2003).

Another emphatic barrier to female career advancement in Nigeria is the common cultural practice of marrying a girl at a younger age without giving them the opportunity to pursue their career after marriage by husbands and as well restriction to married ladies to involve fully in organizational activities such as mixed gender mentoring and networking. This impliedly leads to lower positions and prospect of female in the formal sector and has given men chance of perpetual dominance in the Nigerian universities. Besides, marriage goes with domestic chores in Africa with women responsible of taking care of children, husband and other house activities such as daily cooking. This however, noted from interviews to affect career advancement of female academic staff.

Conclusion

In consideration with Bandura's postulation. Social cognitive career theory postulates that socio-structural factors and supports and minority status can serve to the power or hinder human agency in career development (Lent, 2005). Therefore, removing socio-cultural barriers and employing socio-cultural support can influence female career advancement. This theory is even more relevant to a traditional society like Nigeria, where socio-cultural factors serve as strong mechanism that mould and affect personal and formal ways of lives of people in the country. Hence, it is recommended to reorient people on the need to understand the important role of female academic staff in the university and nation development.

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