

Education Management and the Challenges Facing Women Academics in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: Implications for Gender-Responsive Institutional Development

Eze, Ifeoma Nonyelum¹

¹ Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, University of Abuja, Nigeria, Nigeria
E-mail: ifeoma.eze@uniabuja.edu.ng

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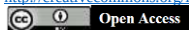
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ABSTRACT

Women academics constitute an important component of the human resources required for effective teaching, research, innovation and community service in Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, their participation and advancement within the academic profession continue to be affected by several institutional, social and professional challenges. This paper examines the challenges facing women academics in Nigerian tertiary institutions from an education management perspective. The paper identifies gender inequality and limited access to academic leadership, work–family conflict and excessive workload, inadequate mentorship and professional support, limited access to research funding, underrepresentation in decision-making, and sociocultural expectations as major challenges affecting women's academic development. These challenges have implications for staff productivity, research output, career advancement, institutional leadership and the overall effectiveness of tertiary education management. The paper argues that effective education management requires institutional policies and practices that promote equity, inclusion, professional development and equal opportunities for male and female academics. The paper recommends the establishment of gender-responsive management policies, structured mentoring programmes, equitable workload distribution, improved access to research funding, family-friendly institutional policies and transparent promotion procedures. Such measures would strengthen women's participation in academic leadership and contribute to more effective and inclusive management of Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Introduction

Education management is concerned with the effective planning, organisation, coordination, supervision and evaluation of human and material resources for the achievement of educational objectives. In tertiary institutions, effective education management depends substantially on the availability, development and effective utilisation of academic and non-academic personnel. Academic staff are particularly important because they are responsible for teaching, research, student development, innovation, supervision and community service. Consequently, the effective management of academic personnel is central to the achievement of institutional goals. Women have increasingly participated in higher education as students, academics, researchers and administrators. Despite this progress, evidence indicates that women academics in Nigeria continue to encounter institutional and sociocultural barriers that may affect their career advancement. Ogbogu (2011) reported gender inequality in Nigerian universities and identified factors such as inadequate mentoring, family responsibilities and institutional practices as challenges affecting women's academic progression. These challenges become particularly important from an education management perspective because institutional management determines, to a considerable extent, how staff recruitment, workload allocation, professional development, promotion and leadership opportunities are organised.

Work–family conflict is another important issue affecting women academics. Ademuyiwa et al. (2022) found that female staff in Nigerian higher institutions experienced work–family conflicts associated with factors such as long working hours, inadequate working facilities and other workplace conditions. Such pressures can affect the ability of women academics to devote sufficient time to research, publication, professional development and administrative responsibilities. The issue of career

advancement is also closely connected with education management. Oti (2013) found that social and institutional factors influence the career growth and leadership participation of female academics in South-West Nigerian universities. Similarly, research on women academics in Nigerian universities has identified inadequate mentorship, limited research funding, workload imbalance and sociocultural expectations as barriers to research productivity and career advancement (Ejike et al., 2025). These challenges suggest that gender inequality in tertiary institutions is not merely an individual problem but also an institutional management issue.

From an education management perspective, the underrepresentation of women in senior academic and administrative positions may limit the diversity of perspectives available for institutional decision-making. Effective education management should therefore ensure that academic staff are provided with equitable opportunities to develop their professional capacities and contribute to institutional governance. Gender-responsive management is particularly important because the needs and professional circumstances of staff may differ, and institutional policies should prevent such differences from becoming barriers to career development. Furthermore, sociocultural expectations regarding women's family and domestic responsibilities may create additional pressures for female academics. Ogunode and Hassan (2023) identified cultural practices, patriarchal expectations, career demands and inadequate implementation of gender-related policies among factors affecting women in Nigerian tertiary education. These issues have implications for institutional management because policies concerning workload, maternity, staff development, promotion, research opportunities and leadership appointments can either reduce or reinforce existing inequalities. Therefore, there is a need for Nigerian tertiary institutions to adopt management practices that recognise women's contributions and provide equitable opportunities for professional advancement. Effective education management should move beyond simply increasing women's numerical participation in tertiary institutions to ensuring their meaningful participation in research, academic leadership, institutional governance and decision-making.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Tertiary Institutions

Tertiary institutions constitute an important level of the Nigerian education system. They provide education beyond secondary schooling and are responsible for advanced teaching, research, professional training, skills development and community service. In Nigeria, the term encompasses different categories of institutions, including universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) defines tertiary education as education that builds on secondary education and provides learning activities in specialised fields, with the objective of developing knowledge and competencies at a high level of complexity and specialisation. UNESCO further explains that tertiary education includes both academic education and advanced vocational or professional education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics [UIS], n.d.). The Federal Ministry of Education (FME) describes tertiary education in Nigeria as education that follows the completion of senior secondary education. It includes universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in both the public and private sectors (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2019). This definition is particularly relevant to the Nigerian context because it establishes the institutional boundaries of tertiary education. Therefore, when discussing tertiary institutions in Nigeria, reference is not restricted to universities. Polytechnics and colleges of education are also important components of the tertiary education system.

Concept of Women Academics

The concept of women academics refers to women who are professionally engaged in academic work within tertiary educational institutions. Their responsibilities generally include teaching, research, student supervision, academic administration, community service and other scholarly activities. In the Nigerian context, the concept is particularly important because women constitute an essential component of the academic workforce but continue to experience challenges concerning representation, career advancement and leadership. Academic staff are professionals whose primary responsibilities involve teaching, research and other academic services in higher education institutions. Nigerian literature describes academic staff as the teaching personnel of tertiary institutions who implement academic programmes and participate in teaching, research and community service (Ogunode et al., 2024). On this basis, women academics can be defined as female members of the academic workforce

of tertiary institutions who engage in teaching, research, supervision and other scholarly or academic responsibilities. The term therefore covers female lecturers, professors, researchers and other female personnel whose principal duties are academic.

Ogunode and Hassan (2023) examined women academics specifically within the Nigerian tertiary education system. They describe women academics in relation to their participation in the core functions of tertiary education, particularly teaching, research and community service. Their study also identifies women academics as an important component of the Nigerian tertiary education workforce while drawing attention to their underrepresentation and the challenges affecting their participation. Oti (2013) conceptualised female academics in relation to their career growth and leadership positions in Nigerian universities. Her study investigated female academics' career advancement and leadership attainment and examined the influence of parental support, spousal support, attitudes of male academics and collegial relationships. The study demonstrates that women academics constitute a professional group whose career development is influenced not only by academic qualifications and competence but also by institutional and social factors.

Accordingly, women academics may be defined from a career-management perspective as female academic professionals who participate in the teaching, research and service functions of tertiary institutions and who seek progression through the academic career structure into senior academic and leadership positions. This conceptualisation is supported by Nigerian empirical evidence. Ogbogu (2011) found that women remain underrepresented in Nigerian academia and identified factors such as inadequate mentoring, family responsibilities and traditional expectations concerning women's roles as factors affecting their academic development. Similarly, Olaogun et al. (2015) reported gender imbalance in the composition of academic staff in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions, with men outnumbering women.

Result and Discussion on Challenges Facing Women Academics in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Gender inequality, patriarchal practices and barriers to career advancement

One major challenge facing women academics in Nigerian tertiary institutions is gender inequality and the persistence of patriarchal practices within academic institutions. Although women contribute significantly to teaching, research, supervision and community service, they remain comparatively underrepresented, particularly in senior academic and leadership positions. Ogbogu (2011), in a study of three federal universities in Southwestern Nigeria, found that gender inequality in Nigerian academia was associated with factors including inadequate mentoring, family responsibilities and traditional expectations concerning women's roles. The study further observed that women were less represented as academic rank increased, with the disparity having implications for their research output and academic development. More recent evidence continues to demonstrate that institutional and sociocultural barriers affect women's academic progression. Ejike, Igwe, and Ukpere (2025), using data from 134 women academics at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, found that sociocultural norms, institutional barriers, gendered expectations, workload imbalances, inadequate mentorship and limited access to research funding contribute to gender inequality in research productivity and career advancement. The authors described these structural constraints as producing a "glass ceiling" that limits women's progression in academic careers. Thus, women academics may have to overcome additional social and institutional barriers before attaining positions such as professor, dean, head of department or other senior leadership positions. This situation can limit the diversity of perspectives in university decision-making and reduce the visibility of women's contributions to knowledge production and academic governance (Ogunode, & Ahmed & Yahaya 2021).

Work–family conflict and excessive domestic responsibilities

A second important challenge is the difficulty of balancing academic responsibilities with family and domestic responsibilities. Academic work requires considerable time for lectures, student supervision, marking, research, publication, conferences, administrative duties and community service. These responsibilities can become particularly demanding for women who are simultaneously expected to undertake substantial childcare, household management and other family responsibilities. Ademuyiwa, Dahunsi, Adetunji, and Adeniran (2022) examined work–family conflicts among female staff in Nigerian higher institutions using respondents drawn from universities, polytechnics and colleges

of education across six states. Their findings showed that long working hours, inadequate working facilities and inadequate pay were major contributors to work–family conflict. The study also identified stress, mental fatigue and psychological burnout as important consequences. This challenge has direct implications for women's academic productivity. For example, a female academic who spends substantial time attending to childcare and household responsibilities may have less time available for research, scholarly writing, conference participation and professional networking. Since promotion in Nigerian tertiary institutions commonly depends heavily on research publications, conferences and other scholarly achievements, unequal domestic responsibilities can indirectly affect women's career advancement. Ejike et al. (2025) similarly found that gendered expectations and disproportionate household and caregiving responsibilities can restrict women's ability to concentrate on research and other career-building activities.

Inadequate mentorship, research funding and professional support

A third challenge is limited access to mentorship, research funding, professional networks and other forms of institutional support. Academic progression depends not only on individual competence but also on opportunities to participate in research projects, obtain grants, publish in reputable journals, attend conferences and develop professional networks. Where women have limited access to these opportunities, their ability to compete for promotion and leadership positions may be weakened. Ogbogu (2011) identified lack of mentoring as one of the factors associated with the underrepresentation and slower academic development of women in Nigerian universities. Similarly, Hassan, Baharom, and Abdul Mutalib (2017) examined social capital and career advancement among female academic staff in Nigerian universities and emphasized the importance of social relationships and professional networks in career advancement. More recent evidence by Ejike et al. (2025) provides further support. Their study found that lack of access to research funding, inadequate mentorship and insufficient support networks constitute important institutional barriers affecting women's research productivity and career advancement. Limited access to research resources can consequently reduce women's opportunities to produce high-quality publications, participate in collaborative research and compete successfully for promotion. The problem is therefore not simply whether women are qualified to become successful academics; it is also whether tertiary institutions provide them with equal access to the resources, networks, mentoring and institutional opportunities required to build successful academic careers (Ogunode, & Ndubuisi, 2021)..

Underrepresentation in academic leadership positions

Another major challenge is the underrepresentation of women in senior academic and administrative leadership positions. Although the number of women participating in higher education has increased, women remain less represented as they move upward through the academic hierarchy. Oti (2013) found that female academics in South-West Nigerian universities experienced slower career advancement and lower representation in leadership positions. The study also demonstrated the importance of social support from spouses, parents and colleagues in women's career growth. Similarly, Omotoso (2020), in a study involving the University of Ibadan and Covenant University, identified barriers affecting female academics' movement from middle-level positions to senior leadership. The study described this as a form of "leaky pipeline", whereby women enter academic careers but progressively become fewer at higher leadership levels. Cultural and institutional factors, role entrapment and limited opportunities for advancement contribute to this problem. The underrepresentation of women in leadership has important implications for tertiary institutions because women may have fewer opportunities to influence institutional policies, resource allocation, staff development and gender-responsive decision-making (Ogunode, Lawan, & Yusuf, 2021).

Heavy workload and unequal distribution of academic responsibilities

Heavy academic workload and unequal distribution of responsibilities constitute another important challenge. Women academics may be required to combine teaching, examination, student supervision, research, publication, administrative duties and community service with substantial family responsibilities. When these responsibilities are not equitably distributed, women may have less time for research and scholarly activities that are important for promotion. Ejike, Igwe, and Ukpere (2025), in their study of 134 women academics at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, identified workload imbalances and gendered expectations among the factors contributing to gender inequality in research

productivity and career advancement. The problem is significant because promotion in universities is strongly connected with research publications, conference participation, grants and other scholarly achievements. Consequently, excessive teaching and administrative responsibilities can reduce the time available for research and publication. This may create a cycle in which women are heavily involved in institutional service but receive fewer career benefits from those activities (Ogunode & Solomon, 2021).

Limited access to research funding and scholarly opportunities

A further challenge is limited access to research funding and other professional development opportunities. Research is central to the academic profession, yet conducting quality research requires financial resources for data collection, fieldwork, laboratory activities, conference participation, publication and research collaboration. Ejike et al. (2025) found that limited access to research funding and inadequate mentorship were among the structural factors restricting women's research productivity and career advancement in Nigerian universities. Their findings suggest that gender inequality in academic careers cannot be explained only by individual differences in ability or commitment; institutional access to resources also matters. Similarly, Idris (2020) identified the availability of fellowships, institutional policies, family support and opportunities for professional development as important factors influencing the career advancement of female academics in Nigerian universities. When women have inadequate access to research grants, fellowships, conferences and professional networks, they may find it more difficult to establish strong research profiles and compete effectively for promotion to senior academic positions (Ogunode, 2020)..

Cultural and sociocultural expectations about women's roles

Cultural and sociocultural expectations also constitute a significant challenge for women academics in Nigeria. Traditional expectations may place greater responsibility for childcare, household management and family obligations on women. These expectations can conflict with the demanding requirements of academic careers. Ogunode and Hassan (2023) identified cultural and religious beliefs, early marriage practices, career demands, patriarchal practices, economic constraints and inadequate implementation of gender policies among the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in Nigerian tertiary education. Idris (2020) similarly emphasized the importance of work–life balance, maternity leave and family support in women's academic career advancement. Thus, sociocultural expectations can influence women's ability to pursue postgraduate education, attend conferences, undertake research, accept leadership responsibilities or relocate for professional opportunities. The problem becomes particularly serious when institutional promotion systems do not adequately recognize the effects of maternity, childcare and other legitimate family responsibilities. Without supportive institutional policies, women may be required to compete under conditions that do not adequately account for these additional responsibilities.

Table 1: Consolidated Seven Challenges

The seven challenges facing women academics in Nigerian tertiary institutions can therefore be summarized as:

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1. Gender inequality, patriarchal practices and discrimination.
 2. Work–family conflict and excessive domestic responsibilities.
 3. Inadequate mentorship, research funding and professional support.
 4. Underrepresentation in academic leadership positions.
 5. Heavy workload and unequal distribution of academic responsibilities.
 6. Limited access to research funding and scholarly opportunities.
 7. Cultural and sociocultural expectations about women's roles.
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These challenges are interconnected. For example, cultural expectations may increase women's domestic responsibilities; domestic responsibilities may contribute to workload pressures; excessive workload can reduce research productivity; and lower research productivity can subsequently affect promotion and access to academic leadership.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women academics are essential to the development and effective management of Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, their professional advancement continues to be affected by gender inequality,

work–family conflict, excessive workload, inadequate mentoring, limited access to research funding, restricted leadership opportunities and sociocultural expectations. These challenges are interconnected and can negatively influence women's research productivity, career progression and participation in institutional decision-making.

The challenges facing women academics should therefore be regarded as important education management concerns rather than purely personal or social problems. University and other tertiary institution managers have a responsibility to create institutional environments in which academic staff, irrespective of gender, have equitable opportunities to develop professionally and contribute to institutional development. Gender-responsive education management can strengthen staff morale, improve academic productivity, enhance research output and promote more inclusive institutional leadership. Nigerian tertiary institutions should consequently integrate gender equity into staff development, promotion, workload allocation, research funding, mentoring and leadership policies.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

- 1) Establishment of gender-responsive education management policies: Tertiary institutions should develop and implement policies that promote equal opportunities for male and female academics in recruitment, promotion, professional development, research and leadership.
- 2) Creation of structured mentoring programmes: Institutions should establish formal mentoring programmes through which experienced academics can guide early-career women academics in research, publication, grant writing, networking and career development.
- 3) Equitable distribution of academic workload: Education managers should ensure that teaching, administrative and other institutional responsibilities are distributed fairly among academic staff. Excessive workloads that disproportionately affect women should be avoided.
- 4) Improved access to research funding: Universities and other tertiary institutions should provide transparent and equitable access to internal research grants, conference sponsorships, fellowships and other professional development opportunities.
- 5) Promotion of women in academic leadership: Institutional managers should provide equal opportunities for qualified women academics to occupy positions such as heads of departments, deans, directors and other leadership positions. Leadership selection should be based on competence, experience and transparent criteria rather than gender stereotypes.
- 6) Family-friendly institutional policies: Tertiary institutions should strengthen policies relating to maternity leave, childcare support, flexible work arrangements where appropriate and other measures that can assist academic staff in balancing professional and family responsibilities.
- 7) Transparent promotion procedures: Promotion criteria and procedures should be clearly communicated and consistently applied to all academic staff. Institutions should ensure that gender-related barriers do not disadvantage qualified women during promotion exercises.
- 8) Gender-sensitive institutional monitoring: Education managers should regularly collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data on recruitment, promotion, research funding, publications, leadership positions and staff development. Such data can help institutions identify persistent inequalities and design appropriate interventions.
- 9) Strengthening women's participation in decision-making: Women academics should be adequately represented on university committees, academic boards, governing bodies and other institutional decision-making structures.
- 10) Regular evaluation of gender policies: Tertiary institutions should periodically evaluate the effectiveness of their gender-related policies and programmes. Where gaps are identified, management should take corrective measures to ensure that gender equality becomes an integral component of institutional development.

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