

## **Influence of Gender on Career Choice and Academic Performance**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study aims to examine how gender affect students' academic achievement and career targets or choices in Nigerian colleges. The sample of this study consisted of 261 final year students in various universities across Nigeria. Data was collected using questionnaires featuring questions on academic accomplishments and other pertinent information. The results of the study indicated that male students had a slightly higher overall CGPA score compare to the female students; and as regards career aspirations, more female students were inclined to study art and management related courses while more males were found in engineering and technology-based courses. The research found that gender difference does not significantly affect students' academic success in Nigerian colleges. Instead, the research discovered that students' perceptions of gender had a substantial influence on their career aspirations. The study recommends that promoting freedom in choosing careers is likely to steer students toward other professions that are completely at odds with their gender preferences*

**KEYWORDS:** gender, university, career aspirations, students, academic achievement

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Choosing a career is an importunate and distressing problem throughout the world (World Bank, 2014). It usually encumbers young people with apprehension, stress and confusion especially at the beginning. This is due to the fact that, more often than not, students view their future freedom, employment, general success and total standard of living to be directly connected to their career choice. Ritchiteanu-Natase and Staiculescu (2015) opine that students express worries about their capacity to get and hold a job due to internal and environmental factors that they regard as barriers to or enablers of finding future occupation.

This stress grows as opportunities for a chosen vocation become less favorable for a variety of reasons, including the economy's downturn, a lack of employment opportunities, declining health, or even lack of desire in continuing to pursue education. In a culture like Nigeria, where initial decisions on career path is frequently a family

matter (Denga, 1988), students often feel anxious about disappointing their parents and other close relatives while deciding whether to continue in the field of study they are currently enrolled in or take a completely different career path after graduation. In literature, a number of external and internal variables have been put forth as influencers on the decision to pursue a certain vocation. These include academic orientation and training acquired while in school, nature of the job/ industry, societal view and status of the chosen career, gender related concerns, personal/family characteristics and concerns remuneration (Gambo et al., 2012; Ayiah-Mensah, Mettle & Ayimah, 2014; Ekung & Okonkwo, 2015; Francis, 2017).

Today's society gives a lot of weight to the kind of work a person undertakes. Because some careers increase influence, reputation, and financial worth compared to others, this is the case. The term "career" refers to a person's vocational growth and activities throughout the course of their entire life. Career development happens over the course of a person's life. It entails developing and putting into practice a vocational self-idea. The society's overall development depends exclusively on the daily activities of human venture. Work has been the foundation of civilization throughout history. Yet, in recent years, both the nature of employment and worker responsibilities has changed. The majority of work used to be done by hands, backs, and minds, but recently, technology has supplanted most human labor. Any healthy person will eventually find themselves engaged in one or more types of careers.

There is noticeably a gender gap in certain career aspirations. For instance, in 1983, only 3% of engineers were women. (Rowley & Home, 2005). Only a small percentage of women choose careers in the armed forces, technology, or engineering.

### **Statement of problem**

Gender disparities still have an impact on our economy and on the educational system. Men and women continue to acquire the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes required for any vocation through education. Lecturers and everyone involved in the education sector have recently expressed significant worry about the issue of students' academic performance at universities and other higher education institutions. The influence of gender on career choice and academic performance is a topic of continuing study interest.

There is a presumption that everyone who is admitted to a university, regardless of gender, can handle the academic demands and responsibilities. On the other hand, some students drop out before finishing their university degrees, while others change their course of study or stay in school for an additional year or two. This scenario gives the impression that performance may also be due to other factors. The aforementioned issue inspired the researcher to investigate whether certain demographic factor, such as gender, do in fact have an impact on the academic performance and career aspirations of students in Nigerian Universities.

### **Objective of study**

- To determine the role of gender in the academic performances of students in Nigerian universities
- To evaluate the influence of gender in choosing career aspirations of Nigerian university students.

### **Hypothesis**

-There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students in Nigerian Universities.

## **REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE**

### **Gender and academic performance**

Anderson (2004) defines gender as the social characteristics and possibilities that come with being male or female, as well as the interactions between girls and boys, women and men, and women and women. These qualities, possibilities, and connections are socially produced and developed through socialization processes. They vary depending on the situation and the time. What is expected, permitted, and valued in a woman or a man in a particular circumstance is determined by gender. In most countries, women and men are treated differently and unequally in terms of the tasks they are given, the activities they engage in, the resources they can access and manage, and the opportunity they have to make decisions. The socio-cultural background of gender is complex.

Gender refers to how men and women are related to one another and the many roles, rights, and obligations that each gender has. Men and women are not the only categories referred to by the term "gender," which also refers to how socialization shapes people's traits, actions, and identities. Generally speaking, gender is linked to uneven access to resources, power, and choices (Alimi, Ehinola & Alabi, 2012). Realities in history, society, religion, economy, and culture have an impact on how men and women are positioned. Throughout time, these relationships and obligations may alter, and they frequently do.

The term "gender" also acknowledges the intersection of women's experiences of discrimination and human rights violations, which are based not only on their genders but also on other power relations that result from race, ethnicity, caste, class, age, ability, disability, religion, and a variety of other factors. The relationship between men and women, which is referred to as gender relations, is defined differently in different countries. A society where men and women have equal power relationships does not exist, nevertheless.

A variety of institutions, including the family, the legal system, and the market, contribute to and shape gender relations. Gender relations are power relationships that are hierarchical between men and women and always work against women (Greiff &

Neubert, 2014). In comparison to boys, girls graduate from high school more frequently and with higher grades (Finn, 2008). Girls continue to have superior verbal aptitude into high school, but after the fourth grade, they start to lag behind boys in math and scientific aptitude exams. Concern among educators worldwide stems from gender disparities in scientific and mathematics ability, which have implications for young women's future professions.

Gender differences in academic attainment and in education are very important, and they have persisted for a very long time. Several studies in the field have demonstrated that ladies in universities do not perform as well as their male colleagues (Becker 2005; Finn 2008; Erickson, 2009). According to Aiken (2007), men outperform women in terms of academic accomplishments. According to Glenn (2009), there is a significant gender discrepancy in school achievement, which further supports the presence of a gender gap in some American schools. They discovered from an investigation of minimal variety that there was nearly universally high potential for accomplishment among girls and that there was only a minor difference in the gender gap among schools. Fryer and Levitt (2009), on the other hand, found that the gender disparity in student results was highly stable across demographic categories, leading them to draw the basic conclusion that there is variation in the gender gap among schools. According to Kelly (2007), boys outperform girls in the sciences, with mathematics and practical exams showing the biggest disparity. More specifically, gender bias is when someone acts or makes decisions about another person based on that person's gender. Gordon (1995) found that instructors of both sexes acknowledge that boys and girls have different potentials based on their unique gendered natures, intellects, and dispositions.

Teachers tend to represent boys as being more academically focused, having rapid cognitive abilities, and having the capability to manage challenging and demanding school tasks. Yet, Finn (2008) found in a research that academic performance between boys and girls in Britain followed a consistent trend, demonstrating equality of accomplishment at all levels. Boys appear to dominate exchanges, discussions, and question-and-answer sessions in the school context, whereas females conform to gender expectations when they remain silent or exhibit harmonizing behaviors.

Also, Vock, Preckel and Holling (2011) pointed out that students' academic success mostly depends on their intellectual abilities. In a study conducted by Aitken (2004), 404 individuals (203 men and 201 women) completed four scales of a standardized IQ test that was given to them in groups. The results of this study revealed that achievement and an intelligence component had a slight to moderately favorable complimentary connection. In addition, Deary et al. (2007) discovered that, with the exception of physics, girls performed better than boys in all academic disciplines. This outcome demonstrated the validity of gender differences and their effects.

Female students do not do as well as male students, according to Kuhn and Holling's (2009) research on tests of higher-level biological attainment abilities among male and

female students. In contrast, Ezewu (2003) found that males outperformed girls in art topics in a research that was designed to detect any differences between male and female academic performance. This finding confirms an earlier argument that the choice of subjects may have contributed to the performance gap. Nonetheless, according to social trend surveys, males are disproportionately underrepresented in several arts, like language and history. James (2005) also looked at the representation of men and women in math classes to see whether there were any gender differences. He used 364 students and discovered that, while the difference was not statistically significant, girls regularly outperformed boys in all mathematics class levels. Also, they discovered that a group of boys who are academically bright usually maintain greater rank as they age. Until date, Ezewu (2003) conducted study to determine whether there are gender inequalities in the academic accomplishment of the sexes. He employed 10 mixed secondary schools to choose the six hundred (600) topics, three hundred (300) for each gender. He used the school's records of the results of the final exams. The participants, who were selected at random from the third year of the 10 schools, ranged in age from 14 to 16 years. The findings showed that guys typically excelled in mathematics while girls excelled in English language.

### **Gender and academic Career Choice**

A lot has been written on gender issues in regard to career choice especially the field of construction and architecture, with a focus on the low retention rates of skilled female employees (De Graft-Johnson, Manley & Greed, 2005). There are various reasons for this focus. First, society both local and worldwide, perceives construction as a career inappropriate for women. This belief that women should stay at home and take care of the family is deeply ingrained in Nigerian culture and religion (Adogbo, Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2015).

Second, women are generally given more occupations and vocations in the service sector while men are traditionally given more research and technology-based ones (ibid). Amaratunga et al. (n.d.) draw attention to the openly macho culture of the construction industry, where male ideals like as extended work hours, frequently spent away from family, labor intensity, and spatial volatility are ingrained. Hence, gender-based discrimination against women includes harassment, a lack of job opportunities, unequal compensation, and less promotion opportunities (De GraftJohnson, Manley & Greed, 2005; Francis, 2017).

The choice of a career is one of the educational challenges faced by many educated youngsters in Nigeria because there are so many applications but little job prospects. In light of this evolution, a student must be careful to select a highly professional course in order to earn a living even if he or she is not hired by a private or public ministry. It is generally acknowledged that a profession is founded on organized intellectual information transmitted through some kind of educational procedure.

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Only those who have completed a certain school program or training can enter a profession (Watts, 2007). While men predominate, female students have shown little interest in important professional fields like pharmacy, technology, engineering, and other subjects that are mathematically connected (Green, 2009). One of the variables that can be linked to this phenomenon is likely the gender realities that shape human conduct. Human behavior and preferences are influenced by gender both naturally and socially. The biological activities of man produce human actions. The most important change in behavior resulted from the psychology known as "behaviorism," which was advanced by famous theorists like Skinner and Ivan Pavlov.

It is possible to view gender statistics in career choice from a societal perspective. Government, culture, and traditional background have a bigger influence on career choice in some societies. In some social contexts, women are not allowed to work and support their families; instead, they only allow men to do so. This prevents women from enrolling in schools and, as a result, from choosing a vocation. This is likely the reason why women are less likely than men to achieve exceptional feats (Tyler, 2005).

In this context, behavior refers to those character traits that are inherited from our parents (gene), which distinguishes us from others by the ways in which we act, feel, and view the world. Behavior reveals qualities like intelligence, proper speech, good eyesight, proper gait, and more. Negative characteristics include fear, timidity, frailty, and low IQ. These qualities are innate. They are not brought on by the environment. They play a significant role in behavior and differ between the sexes, which has an impact on our choices about what we eat, our careers, our friends, and our partners in life, to name a few. As a result, women tend to pursue single honors courses while males pursue majors.

Parents are social influences that influence a gender's profession decision. Parents frequently have a significant impact on both their male and female children. Young people's job development is often likened to polishing rocks. A lot of different people work on them, but parents are the biggest rocks in the number (Otto, 2009). There is no substitute for parents' impact on their children's job plans (Hines, 2004). Environment, peer group, family, and opportunities are some of the factors that have a varied impact on men and women's choices in a certain sector.

Peers influence how an adolescent develops their sense of self and career choice, either directly or indirectly. Students constantly compare themselves to others as a result of their desire for a position in the social sphere, particularly the workplace, and rate themselves on a variety of criteria, including what they plan to do when they finish school. As a result, how peers act toward one another and how they feel about schools affects their interest in choosing a topic of study. So, the fact that she is a woman would urge her friends to choose her offer, which may be a single honor program.

Concerns have been raised about social perception and image problems. Some occupations are more highly regarded than others. The way society perceives a specific field influences whether or not students choose to study it. The administrative bottleneck of admittance into the university to study a certain course in addition to the time required to complete such studies are another element that affects the job choice of gender. According to observation, women desire to drop out of school to indulge their marriage inclinations.

They commit to practice discipline in order to do this, giving them the chance to accomplish their goals. Also, compared to careers that are not science-oriented, the admission requirements are rather strict in these fields. This significantly lowers the proportion of female students enrolling in these courses.

## METHODOLOGY

An integrated mixed methodology research strategy was used for this investigation. This required a quantitative and quantitative methodologies, which allowed the researcher to investigate the relationship between the three variables of sex, career preference/aspirations, and academic success in order in order to investigate the impact of gender on career choice and academic performance in Nigerian universities. The investigation also used a qualitative phenomenological research methodology. 300 final-year students from different colleges in Nigeria, including state, federal, and privately held schools, made up the target group. They were chosen at random for the selective selection because they simply met the study's unique requirements. A questionnaire about the academic achievement and personal information of the students was the research tool used. The survey asked for information about the student's name, sex, field, location of residence, and cumulative grade point average (CGPA) earned while enrolled in the institution. The data gathered revealed that 261 of the 300 surveys were finished, representing an 87% involvement rate.

The information was analyzed and organized using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantifiable data from articles and polls is presented as numbers, Tables, Graphs, and percentages to make it simpler to understand. With the aid of the Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), quantitative data was analyzed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic characteristics of Participants/Respondents

**Table 1. Characteristics of participants**

Variables	Levels	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	138	52.9
	Female	123	47.1
<b>Residential status</b>	Hostel	156	59.8
	Off-campus	105	40.2

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<b>School Ownership</b>	Private	84	32.2
	Public	177	67.8

Table 1's outcome reveals that respondents to the research gave information on students genders, residence status, and school management. This provided a representative sample of responses for this research. However, a demographic analysis showed that there were more men (52.9%) than women (47.1%), suggesting that there are fewer females in colleges across Nigeria.

In terms of residence status, students are more likely to live on-campus (59.8%), while off-campus (40.2%). This difference may be due to the cost of on-campus housing or hostel accommodation being less than that of off-campus housing. The results also showed that majority of the participants went to public universities (67.8%) while (32.2%), this result could also be due to the expensive nature of private universities in Nigeria.

### Career Aspirations of Participants

**Table 2. Faculties of respondents/participants to depict career Aspiration**

Faculties	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Agricultural studies</b>	15	71.4	6	28.6
<b>Arts</b>	9	18.8	39	81.2
<b>Biological sciences</b>	15	45.5	18	54.5
<b>Management studies</b>	9	27.3	24	72.7
<b>Education</b>	12	44.4	15	55.6
<b>Engineering</b>	42	82.4	9	17.6
<b>Medical sciences</b>	21	70	9	30
<b>Physical sciences</b>	15	83.3	3	16.7

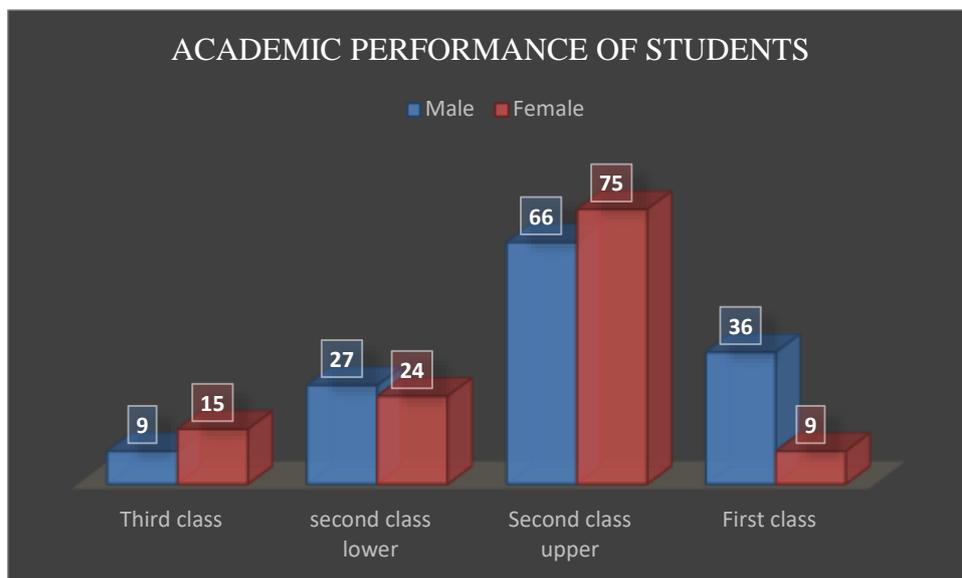
It has been demonstrated that pronounced gender prejudices have a significant impact on university students' job choice trends throughout Nigeria. For instance, there were 81.2% more females than males enrolled in art-related courses, which would include classes in tourism, mass communication, music, theater arts, etc. Men concentrated in fields like engineering (82.4%), physical sciences (83.3%), and agricultural studies (71.4%), which are seen as traditionally manly fields. It's interesting that more women than men selected fields like biological sciences (54.5%), which were traditionally controlled by men. Students should be urged to follow this adaptable pattern of abandoning professional traditionalism to broaden their variety of preferences.

According to studies by Maarike et al. (2016), Nosek et al. (2009), and Kiani et al. (2018) the effects of both genders on society are to blame for the gender gap in career aspirations. Unfortunately, Kiani, et al (2018) found that success in those particular areas is impacted by gender differences in regard to career aspirations. This may cause

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students' academic achievement to languish and a shortage of women in certain professions (Van Hek & Pelzer, 2018). Nigeria really needs more women to enter, stay, and succeed in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) areas. It is absolutely needful therefore to change the structural barriers to gender equality, strong negative stereotypes and unconscious career biases that lead to underrepresentation of women in STEM oriented careers

### Academic Performance of students



**Figure 1.** Influence of Gender on academic performance on students

The figure above illustrates the academic performance of students (male and female) in various schools across Nigeria, the data analyzed was based on their respective CGPA in various schools using the Nigerian grading system of 1.5- 2.49 for third class degree, 2.5-3.49 for second class lower, 3.5-4.49 for second class upper degree and 4.5-5.0 for a first class degree. The results showed that more males were on a first class CGPA than females, more females were also on a third-class degree (15) than males (9). However as regards students with second class upper CGPA, the results depicted more females having this grade than the males. Based on the analysis carried out on the study which indicated that males had a slighter overall mean CGPA score (3.62) than female students (3.54), this indicated that both genders had above the minimum pass mark which was rated at **2.5**

This work is in accordance to Bachan and Reilly (2003) studies, where it was observed that there are differences in the performance of male and female students in the university. The difference in the students' gender academic performance might have been adduced to this assertion by Bachan & Reilly (2003), who perceived that the slightly lower mean scores from females could be due to cultural issues such as

pregnancy while in school, and early marriages. It could also be due to the fact that most of the participants were from the public owned universities where there are lack of infrastructures and lack of proper funding, this could have an impact on students' performance, particularly female students who are often more adversely impacted by them because of their fragile nature.

### **Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students in Nigerian Universities.

Hypothesis 1 was generated to find out the effect of gender difference on the academic performance of the students. To test this hypothesis, students were categorized on gender basis and their CGPA were aligned to their gender difference and this was subjected to t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. Table 3 shows the result of the analysis.

Table 3. T-test result on the relationship between gender and Academic performance

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S. D</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>tcal</b>
<i>Male</i>	138	3.62	0.87	85	1.48
<i>Female</i>	123	3.54	0.79		

From the table 3 above, students' overall performance is presented according to their gender difference. From the table, the mean CGPA of male students is 3.62 while that of their female counterpart is 3.54. A paired sample correlation and difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) show that there is no significant difference between the performance of male and female students. This supports the findings of research by Stewart et al. (2006) and Bechan et al. (2003) that there is no discernible difference between male and female students' performance in their studies and that female students get lower grades than their male counterparts. This research contrasts with Bachan and Reilly's (2003) findings, which found that male and female students performed differently in terms of their academic achievement.

They held the opinion that there are other factors can have an impact on the performance of students in school, such as tardiness, indolence, inadequate prepping, and the fact that many of them spent more time on nonacademic activities than on their academic studies. (Wankowski, 1992). These motives could all be the topic of additional study.

### **Implications to Research and Practice**

The findings in this study have contributed to the understanding that gender of students in Nigerian universities has an influence in career aspirations, but does not really have an impact or influence on their academic performance or achievements. The findings concur with and provide both theoretical and practical implications for educators, parents, and students. The implications are as follows:

- **Educators:** Based on the findings of the study, educators such as teachers and school administrators especially in secondary school level need to provide enabling learning environment for students especially female students by creating the necessary awareness and exposure to the students and inspiring them that they can excel in gender- biased areas of study such as STEM related courses.
- **Parents/Guardians:** Though family initiates molding values in children, the findings indicated that there could be existence of other external factors that contribute to decisions of students in choosing career aspirations as well as affect academic performances. As such it is therefore important that parents should be more open-minded as regards career choice of their wards.

## CONCLUSION

The study looked at how gender differences affected students' academic performance, career preferences, and aspirations. The students were divided into groups based on their gender, and their CGPAs were adjusted to account for these differences. It can be concluded from this that gender has no major impact on or role to play in students' academic performance in Nigerian universities, however there was a slight difference in the average CGPA scores between both genders as the males recorded a slightly higher overall CGPA score than the females. The research also looked into whether a student's residence had any impact on their academic accomplishment. Without taking gender into account, student residences were sorted according to their academic standing, and it was found that residence has no influence on a student's academic standing. However, it appears that gender limits how fully career potentials can be utilized. According to the research, one of the variables that may explain variations in students' career aspirations is gender. As a result, gender has been affecting a variety of views, conduct, and results in the workplace. For example, many female students did not enroll in STEM or engineering-focused courses because they believed that these fields were more appropriate for men.

## Recommendation

- The best way to prepare students for academic and professional achievement is to create a supportive learning atmosphere in the classroom with plenty of employment advice and career-related experiences. By essentially preventing gender from becoming a barrier to reaching educational work potential, this will guarantee equality or impartiality in education.
- So as to improve the performance of both male and female students, all genders need to be provided with equal opportunities in the learning environment. There is need to avail more teaching and learning resources particularly in the sciences
- - All genders must be given equitable chances in the learning setting in order to enhance the success of both male and female pupils. More tools for instruction and learning are required, especially in the disciplines.

### Future Research

Researchers may find it useful to carry out further research on the role gender difference in academic performance in specific field of study such as science, arts engineering and management. Also, more researches should be carried out on ways of encouraging gender equality among students in terms of studying specific courses that has been gender-biased for a long time such as STEM related courses

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