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Dwindling Male Enrolment in Teacher Education in South East Nigeria: A Case of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study examined dwindling male enrolment in teacher education in South East Nigeria with special case for Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze, Anambra State, Nigeria. An ex post facto design was adopted to analyse enrolment of students across departments over three sessions. The findings revealed a significant underrepresentation of male students, with female students consistently dominating enrolment across various departments, particularly in Early Childhood and Educational Management. The study identified key factors contributing to male apathy toward education programmes, including gender stereotypes, economic considerations, cultural expectations, limited male role models, social stigma, a preference for STEM and technical fields, and institutional gaps. The study highlighted the implications of this gender imbalance, particularly in shaping the future teaching workforce and its potential effects on education quality and diversity. To address these issues, the study recommended targeted policy interventions, financial incentives, mentorship programmes, public awareness campaigns, and community engagement to encourage greater male participation in education-related fields. These strategies aim to create a more balanced gender representation in teacher education, ensuring a diverse and inclusive learning environment.*

Keywords: *Enrolment, Gender, Igbo people, Teacher Education*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, gender inequality in education is often viewed from the prism of male dominance. Thus, policies usually are directed towards interventions that will encourage greater female participation. The case is not different in Nigeria's education system; gender inequality is wearing a female toga based on nation-wide statistics that tilt in favour of the male. The implication of this generalization is that little concern is paid to the potential of this newfound perspective creating a new form of inequality as the pendulum of imbalance swings towards the male.

Gender inequality in education is viewed as the unequal treatment or access to educational opportunities based on gender. This imbalance often results in disparities in enrolment, participation, retention, and performance between boys and girls in schools. Gender inequality in education may be influenced by societal norms, cultural practices, economic factors, and systemic discrimination, which can limit individuals' access to education and opportunities for personal and professional development. Gender inequality manifests in several ways such as enrolment gaps, dropout rates, resource allocation, subject segregation, gender violence and cultural practices. Lower enrolment rates for girls, especially in rural and low-income areas, due to cultural norms prioritizing boys' education are often reported (1, 2, 3). There are also reports that girls are more likely to drop out of school due to early marriages, pregnancy, or household responsibilities. One report states that '21% of adolescents – mostly girls – in Nigeria … are kept away from education by marriage and pregnancy' (4). Unequal distribution of educational resources, such as scholarships or school infrastructure, which often favours boys also has been reported (3). In addition, gender stereotypes influencing subject choice, with boys encouraged to pursue science and technology, while girls are directed toward less technical fields have been reported (5). Moreover, gender-based violence and harassment within schools can hinder girls' ability to learn in a safe and supportive environment. Practices like child marriage, domestic responsibilities, and societal

norms often limit girls' access to quality education (4).

From the series of reports above, there is a general understanding of gender inequality in education as a case for the female. These reports, obviously emanating from case studies are generalised in such a way that it has become a universal phenomenon. Most of the studies reporting underrepresentation of the girl child in Nigeria however, are conducted in the northern and south-western parts of the country where cultural practices limit the chances of the girl child (6, 7). Instant cases of reverse observations in south-East Nigeria are either overlooked or drowned in the ocean of this domineering idea. From, the writer's personal observation in South-East Nigeria, gender inequality in education could be a case for the male child, not the female.

South-East is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The area comprises five states, namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states. The zone is bounded by the Cross River on the East, River Niger on the West, the flat North Central to the North, and the riverine Niger Delta on the South. It is divided between the Cross–Niger transition forests ecoregions in the south and the Guinean forest–savanna mosaic in the drier north. Culturally, the vast majority of the zone falls within Igboland–the indigenous homeland of the Igbo people, a group which makes up the largest ethnic percentage of the south-eastern population. South-East Nigeria is relatively one of the educationally advantaged states in Nigeria. Reference 8 observed that strong consciousness for education has been developed in South East to a great extent and dropout rate from basic school system has also been reduced in South-East to a great extent.

Despite this advantage, there is a noticeable apathy among the male towards higher education generally and teacher education in particular. This has resulted in paltry number of male teachers in the primary and secondary education systems. It is against this backdrop that this paper reviewed the dwindling male enrolment in teacher education in South-East with special case for Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze, Anambra State, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design
The study adopted an ex post facto design.

Area of the Study
Area of this study is South East, Nigeria. South East is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Other zones are South West, South South, North East, North West and North Central.

Population of Study
The population of study comprised 389 students enrolled in the various departments in Federal College of Education, Anambra State, Nigeria over three sessions (2021/2022, 2022/2023 and 2023/2024). Sample was not drawn.

Instrument for Data Collection
A proforma was developed by researcher providing for gender and frequency of enrollment over the three sessions. Enrolment data of students were obtained from the admission unit of Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Data Analysis
Data were analysed using simple percentage.

Duration
Research lasted one month, covering literature review, data collection, analysis and report writing.

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RESULTS

Table 1: Students' Enrolment for 2021/2022 Academic Session

Department	Female	Male	Total	%Male
Business Education	10	1	11	9.09
Biology Education	8	2	10	20.0
Educational Management and Policy	57	6	63	9.52
Early Childhood and Primary Education	8	-	8	0
Chemistry Education	4	2	6	33.33
Physics Education	2	1	3	33.33
Total	89	12	101	11.88

The table 1 on students' enrolment for the 2021/2022 academic session shows a significant gender imbalance, with female students making up 88.12% (89 out of 101), while male students account for only 11.88% (12 out of 101). This pattern is evident across all departments, though the degree of male underrepresentation varies. In Business Education, there are 10 females and only 1 male, making up 9.09% of the department's enrolment. Biology Education has 8 females and 2 males (20.0% male representation). Educational Management and Policy, which has the highest total enrolment (63 students), consists of 57 females and 6 males, with only 9.52% male participation. Early Childhood and Primary Education stands out with no male students at all, reinforcing the notion that this field is predominantly female. In STEM-related education programs, Chemistry Education and Physics Education each have slightly better male representation at 33.33%. However, their overall enrolment numbers remain low, with only 6 and 3 students, respectively. This suggests that both male and female students may not be favouring these disciplines.

Overall, the data highlights a strong female dominance in education-related courses, with some fields like Early Childhood Education completely excluding males. Even in STEM education programs, male participation remains relatively low. This imbalance may have long-term implications for gender diversity in the teaching profession, emphasizing the need for policies that encourage greater male enrolment in these fields.

Table 2: Students' Enrolment for 2022/2023 Academic Session

Department	Female	Male	Total	%Male
Business Education	15	2	17	11.76
Biology Education	14	2	16	12.50
Maths Education	3	1	4	25.0
Educational Management and Policy	49	14	63	22.22
Early Childhood and Primary Education	13	1	14	7.14
Science Education	3	1	4	25.0
Chemistry Education	3	1	4	25.0
Physics Education	2	-	2	0
Total	102	22	124	17.74

The table II on enrolment data for the 2022/2023 academic session shows a continued gender imbalance, with female students making up 82.26% (102 out of 124) and male students accounting for only 17.74% (22 out of 124). Although male representation has slightly increased compared to the previous year, it remains low across most departments. Business Education recorded 15 females and 2 males, with males making up 11.76% of the enrolment. In Biology Education, 14 females and 2 males resulted in 12.50% male representation. Maths Education, which was not listed in the previous session, had 3 females and 1 male, with males constituting 25.0%. Educational Management and Policy, the department with the highest enrolment (63 students), included 49 females and 14 males, bringing male representation to 22.22%. Early Childhood and Primary Education continues to be female-dominated, with 13 females and only 1 male (7.14%). In science-related education fields, Science Education, Chemistry Education, and Maths Education all had 25.0% male representation. However, Physics Education had no male students at all, making it a completely female-enrolled department. Despite a slight increase in male participation in some departments, the overall trend remains unchanged, with females dominating education-related programs. This persistent gender gap highlights the need for strategies to encourage greater male enrolment, especially in traditionally female-dominated fields.

Table 3: Students' Enrolment for 2023/2024 Academic Session

Department	Female	Male	Total	%Male
Biology Education	91	15	106	14.15
Computer Education	9	10	19	52.63
Integrated Science Education	1	-	1	0
Physics Education	4	5	9	55.56
Chemistry Education	15	9	24	37.50
Maths Education	3	2	5	40.0
Total	123	41	164	25.0

The table 3 on enrolment data for the 2023/2024 academic session shows that female students continue to outnumber males, making up 75% (123 out of 164), while male students account for 25% (41 out of 164). However, some departments have seen increased male participation compared to previous years. Biology Education remains female-dominated, with 91 females and 15 males, resulting in 14.15% male representation. Computer Education stands out with a more balanced enrolment, having 9 females and 10 males, making male students the majority at 52.63%. Integrated Science Education had only one female and no male students, leading to a 0% male representation. In science-related education fields, Physics Education had 4 females and 5 males, with males making up 55.56% of the enrolment. Chemistry Education had 15 females and 9 males, resulting in 37.50% male representation. Maths Education, though small in overall numbers, had 3 females and 2 males, giving it 40.0% male representation.

Overall, while female students still dominate the majority of departments, there is a noticeable increase in male participation, particularly in Computer Education and Physics Education. This shift suggests growing male interest in certain STEM-related education fields, though the overall gender gap remains significant.

Reasons for Low Male Enrolment in South-East, Nigeria

The enrolment data across the three academic sessions show a consistent trend of male apathy and lack of interest in teacher education programme, particularly in non-STEM fields. Several factors could contribute to this pattern.

Gender stereotypes and societal expectations

Teaching and education-related careers, especially in fields like Early Childhood and Educational Management, are often seen as more suitable for women (9). This perception may discourage male students from enrolling in these programmes. Thus, there are few male teachers across early childhood care and education centres across the South-East.

Economic considerations

Many male students perceive careers in education as less financially rewarding compared to fields like engineering, business, or technology, compelling them to opt for professions with higher earning potential (10). This is particularly the case with South-East where younger generational Igbo idea of success is defined by money and ingrained in aggressive business endeavours.

Cultural and traditional roles

In South-East, Nigeria, men are expected to pursue careers in leadership, technical, or business-oriented fields. Teaching, especially at lower education levels, is considered a "nurturing" profession associated with women (5).

Limited male role models

The lack of male teachers and professionals in education may discourage young men from pursuing these careers, as they do not see enough representation of their gender in the field (9). Thus, poor male enrolment in teacher education sets off an unending cycle of lack of male role model in the schools.

Peer influence and social perception

Male students may avoid enrolling in education programmes due to peer pressure and fear of being stigmatized for choosing a profession that is viewed as female-dominated. Peers exert enormous influence on members and this could be a major factor in the dwindling male enrolment rates.

Preference for stem and technical fields

The slight increase in male enrolment in STEM-related education programmes (Physics, Chemistry, and Computer Education) suggests that men may be more inclined toward technical subjects rather than general education fields.

Institutional and policy gaps

The absence of targeted policies and incentives to encourage male enrolment in education courses may contribute to the gender imbalance. Scholarships, mentorship programmes, and awareness campaigns could help address this issue.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of students' enrolment data across the 2021/2022, 2022/2023, and 2023/2024 academic sessions reveals a persistent gender imbalance, with female students overwhelmingly dominating education-related programs. This trend is most pronounced in fields like Early Childhood and Educational Management, while some STEM-related education programs show slightly better male representation. The male apathy towards these programs appears rooted in deep-seated gender stereotypes, economic considerations, cultural expectations, limited male role models, social stigma, a preference for perceived lucrative technical fields, and a lack of targeted institutional support. This consistent underrepresentation of males in education courses poses a potential challenge for achieving gender balance in the teaching workforce, which is crucial for providing diverse role models and perspectives in educational settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Teacher education institutions should launch initiatives to challenge stereotypes that depict teaching as a "female profession".

2. Government should implement scholarship programmes, tuition waivers, and stipends targeted at male students enrolling in education-related fields to reduce economic deterrents.

3. Government should develop and enforce policies that encourage male participation in teaching, such as quotas for male teacher recruitment, career advancement opportunities, and supportive legislation.
4. There is the need to establish mentorship networks connecting male students with experienced male educators who can offer guidance, motivation, and a clear career path within the teaching profession.
5. Institutions should build on the relative success in male enrolment in science education by providing additional resources, support structures, and clear pathways for teaching careers in STEM fields.

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