

# Women Empowerment through Higher Education: An Antidote for Improving Research Capacity and Nigeria Economy in a Turbulent Era

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.903SEDU0160>

Received: 04 March 2025; Accepted: 08 March 2025; Published: 14 April 2025

## ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the role of higher education in empowering Nigerian women to yield research capacity and economic improvement. Four (4) research questions were raised to guide the study. The study employed a descriptive research design of survey type. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select women in tertiary institutions in Ekiti State based on the condition that the researcher lectures in the University. In phase two of this study, simple random sampling technique was used to select one senatorial district (Ekiti Central) out of the three existing senatorial districts in Ekiti State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select two Local Government Areas (LGAs) from the six Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the selected senatorial district in Ekiti State, they were Ado and Efon-Alaaye local government area. Simple random sampling was used to select two schools from each of the two LGAs selected giving a total number of four schools. In all, 60 respondents were sampled for the study. The findings of the study underscored the essential function of higher education as a transformative instrument for empowering women in Nigeria and improving the nation's economic framework and research proficiency. The study found out that dismantling these obstacles by empowering women through higher education has extensive advantages, not alone for individual women but also for the nation at large. The findings also indicated the beneficial roles between women's empowerment and national economic advancement. Ultimately, women's higher education was found to serve not just as a means for gender equality but also as a stimulus for national development. The study recommended that Nigerian government should implement measures that ensure equal access to higher education for women, including specific scholarships and grants for women, especially in rural and neglected area.

## INTRODUCTION

The society's socioeconomic progress is fundamentally influenced by women. In the world system today, when women are participating in societal sustainability, it makes them to achieve their desires. Therefore, programmes for development must include women as participants and beneficiaries. The culture, government, investors, and shareholders all play different roles in the leadership roles through industries and institutions. A number of factors make it difficult for women to advance in their professions within businesses. Cultural and traditional conventions pertaining to, for example, women's roles and duties may prevent women from advancing in a firm (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). The belief that women should put their children first and unconscious discrimination against them might impede a woman's ability to advance in her career. Ellemers (2014); Dal Mas, Paoloni, and Lombardi (2019); Dal Mas and Paoloni (2020). Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013) suggest that this could be because there are not enough women in executive roles to act as role models, and they do not have enough resources, networks, or mentors. Additionally, Cho et al. (2019) assert that women's employment is not subject to the expectations of the society. Women tend to conform more to social

stereotypes that depict them as interpersonal, giving, and considerate of others, whereas men tended to conform more to those that depict them as task-oriented, confident, and motivated to dominate their surroundings. According to American Association of University Women (AAUW, 2016), "attributes of a leader—in addition to the process to accomplish managerial roles—are currently centered on an obsolete male model that blocks women away." The association also identified outdated preconceptions as a hindrance to leadership. Stereotypes based on gender might hinder women's advancement into leadership roles by preventing them from taking on more challenging tasks, getting promoted, or earning more money. Women are portrayed as being more dedicated to their families and homes than to their careers. In contrast, men are typically perceived as being more dedicated to their careers.

The Nigerian woman has not strained herself to the fullest extent possible to reap the rewards of her economic activity and actions. The country's 150 million people, or over 50% of the population, are women, according to the 2006 census. According to the Federal Office of Statistics (2006), 105 million women, or 70% of the population, live and work in rural areas. Global awareness has been growing over the past few decades that except action is taken to advance the interests of women as a group, progress on the planet is endangered. Higher education in particular has been acknowledged as "a dynamic tool for transformation" and "an exceptional tool for influencing national growth. It serves as the cornerstone for fully developing and improving women's orientation. Women are empowered by education because it raises their standard of living. It serves as the cornerstone for women's development in a range of human pursuits and it is an essential instrument that must be made available to them so they can fulfill their potential as active members of the society. Irrespective of gender, workers who had female leaders reported higher levels of commitment; female leaders performed better than males in 11 of 12 engagement categories (Gallup, 2015 State of the American Manager Report) (Sindell & Shamberger, 2016). More women than ever before are entering the job, and colonization and the introduction of formal (Western) education have changed Nigeria's social structure and sparked a silent revolution of immense proportions. Despite this revolution, males have been shown to have higher levels of education than females in both industrialized and building societies. The most significant institutional impediment to women's empowerment is education.

The achievement of all Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), sustainable development, and pro-poor growth all depend on the economic situation of women improving. They ought to involve women by including gender-specific concepts into the creation of policies and programming. Better access to resources and services, such as land, water, technology, innovation, and credit, was help to strengthen women's rights, boost agricultural productivity, decrease hunger, and promote economic growth. Planning for infrastructure improvements should ensure that as many underprivileged men and women as possible can benefit from energy, water, transportation, and telecommunications. Women face obstacles in practically every aspect of the workplace. Opportunities for employment must be expanded. Women also conduct the majority of volunteer responsibilities. By recognizing and valuing the ways in which social employment supports reliable research capacity and economies, development organizations can give this field more attention.

Innovative approaches and teamwork are needed to boost women's economic empowerment. It can be recognized that gender equality, women's empowerment, the full enjoyment of all human rights, and the eradication of poverty are essential to economic and social progress, particularly the achievement of all the Millennium Growth Goals. Collaboration is essential to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (2010).

Women's economic participation and research skills must be strengthened in order to address the financial and economic crises, which are critical for financial stability and growth. It is important to remember that in certain cases, women are bearing the financial weight of the crisis' recovery due to job losses, poor working conditions, and increased precarity. Growth from this helps the underprivileged. Higher salaries and negotiating power for women allow for greater investments in children's education, health, and nutrition, which in turn promotes long-term economic growth. The proportion of women in paid positions rose significantly.

### **Statement of the problem**

The current situation of Nigerian women on empowerment calls for attention due to insufficient accessibility to higher education which hinder them from carrying out their primary assignments effectively. This could make

them less privileged as a result of becoming house help and child bearer as they might not fit to attain economic independence for self- sustainability. This study therefore tries to evaluate the impacts of higher education on Nigerian women.

### **Aim of the Study**

The study aims to assess the impact of higher education as a tool for empowering women to enhance Nigeria's economic system and research capabilities. The study also evaluates women's participation in and access to higher education. This study examines the political and socioeconomic barriers. It gives an example of how women's empowerment using higher education boosts the nation's GDP.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the studies are to:

1. examine the extent to which women in Nigeria have access to and engage in higher education as a means of achieving female empowerment;
2. identify the barriers preventing women from pursuing higher education in the nation;
3. identify the advantages and opportunities of women's empowerment; and
4. study the economic improvement and research capacity of women empowerment through higher education.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Focus was given to women's empowerment, gender equality, higher education, research capability, and economic development when analyzing the literature reviewing. It is the ability to influence change and make important decisions. There are various ways to describe empowerment. Giving people more authority over their own lives by formal or informal means of investing them with power, approving, licensing, enabling, and permitting them. According to Khany and Tazik (2016), empowerment is one of the most crucial demands of leaders that has the potential to maximize employee capabilities, foster innovative thinking and creativity in performing tasks, and improve the organization altogether. It entails creating a supportive environment so that their creative and realization of intellectual potential is possible.

Expanding women's access to educational opportunities, training centers, and leadership roles is an essential aspect of the empowering strategy. According to Das and Sharma (2016), "Empowerment of women using productive jobs, is a component and a tool of development for any country." He also noted that a shortage of financial empowerment among women has a number of detrimental effects, such as poorer health and education outcomes for children, and that it is crucial to ensure that women possess economic, social, and political power. Employee empowerment is a fundamental and crucial component of workplace success, effectiveness and development (Simsek, 2020; Saban et al., 2020).

The reason for this is that a female is the central to the family. The pursuit of realizing one's inbuilt potentials is what empowerment is all about. As a result, women could enhanced potentials, if they are given more power. One of the three basic measures of empowerment is having access to the resources needed to maintain a decent standard of living. Knowledge comes last, followed by the capacity to live a long and healthy life. The achievements that are being highlighted here demonstrate a greater ability on the part of the women to think about, analyze, and act upon the impediments in their lives. The empowerment of women encompasses concerns like; (a) How women see themselves and how others, both close and far away, see them in society. (b) The way men and other women treat women. (c) The ability to make significant decisions regarding matters that impact both themselves and their children (d) The degree to which they impact other family decision-making procedures. It should be emphasized that none of these are practically possible without adequate and appropriate education, particularly at the higher level.

Nigeria higher education includes energies, aptitudes, talents, and knowledge of human beings are the resources of individuals that may be used in the creation of products or the provision of services. The wealth of any country ultimately depends on its human resources of nations. The majority of industrial development comes from investments in people and the advancements made possible by better people, not from increased capital investment. Because of the presence of underdeveloped human resources, developing nations like Nigeria have not experienced increased development rates despite the enormous imports of tangible assets. Despite the labour force's deficiency in the requisite knowledge and abilities, some development is still conceivable from a rise in traditional capital; nevertheless, without the latter, the growth rate will be severely constrained. Therefore, people are needed to staff the newly established and enlarged government services, to implement innovation agricultural and land-use practices, to create new forms of communication, to advance industrialization, to increase research capacity with the purpose of developing the educational system. A fixed or traditional civilization can be transformed by creativity, which calls for a significant investment in strategic human resources. Any nation's human resources can be developed in important ways through higher education. Education frequently affects not only one's ability to make money but also the fundamental nature of life itself. Higher wages are typically earned by those with higher educational attainment, and additionally, individuals are in a stronger position to have healthier and happier lives. Higher education improves one's understanding of how to change behavior and reduce risks in life. According to Naziev (2017), education is the process by which people are able to identify and develop their abilities, grow into intelligent, responsible individuals, and adopt constructive attitudes and behaviour.

The general objective of higher education remains the same, even though it may mean different things to different people. It's the type of teaching that place a strong emphasis on professionalization by equipping its participants with abilities that aren't always related to the official educational process. Communication with classmates, educators, and other academic community members fosters the development of these kinds of talents.

The word "higher education" describes the programs that universities offer in the areas of instruction, investigation, and community service. Both undergraduate and graduate programs fall within the teaching area. Higher education usually entails work toward a degree level or the prerequisites for a degree. Today, in most wealthy countries, a large portion of the population—up to 50%—enrolls in higher education. According to Peter (2019) Higher education is a complex and multifaceted process that compasses teaching, research and service, and is characterized by commitment to academic freedom, intellectual curiosity, and critical thinking. The foundation of higher education is knowledge in concepts. Higher vocational education, which focuses on both theory and practice, could be contrasted with it. Making the decision to obtain a degree and continuing education usually enhances many aspects of life. Academic institution graduates typically earn more money and have more significant wage rises over time than non-graduates. University graduates are also unable to experience long periods of unemployment. However, it must be recognized that university degrees must closely fit the needs of employers and the labor market. University programs that do not align with the labor market needs lead to mass unemployment among recent graduates. Due to a shortage of highly qualified human resources and the need for the country to meet the demands of the growing economy after independence, the Nigerian government appointed the Ashby Commission in April 1959 to look into the country's post-secondary and higher education needs. Among other things, the commission's report suggested the creation of more universities in addition to College Ibadan, which at the time was the only one in the country.

National development still undervalues the potential labor force contribution of educated and competent women and the importance of their education in improving family planning and welfare. It is important to note that a woman's likelihood of remaining in the workforce increases her level of education and involvement in research. Compared to women with only primary education, women with university degrees are expected to enter the workforce at a rate that is more than twice as high. As a result, there is a growing pool of qualified individuals with experience who can fill managerial and supervisory roles. Women who pursue higher education can also make greater contributions to the improvement of agriculture, technology, and industry. Educated women can take on leadership roles in agricultural organizations, promoting women's empowerment and agricultural development (Oxfam, 2019). As a result, increased female access to higher education and skill



development will undoubtedly considerably increase agricultural output and research capacity in other industries.

Women with advanced degrees will have the strength in developing the nation and remodel it. Few women today hold influential positions in the nation and around the world, and their high levels of education are the only thing that makes this possible. There is always possibility for growth, particularly if more women pursue higher education and able to make research capacity to improve economics of the nation.

## METHODOLOGY

A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select women in tertiary institutions in Ekiti State based on the condition that the researcher lecture in the University. In phase two of the study, Simple random sampling technique was used to select one senatorial district (Ekiti central) out of the three existing senatorial districts in Ekiti State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select two Local Government Areas (LGAs) from the six Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the selected senatorial district in Ekiti State, which were Ado and Efon- Alaaye. Simple random sampling was used to select two schools from each of the two LGAs selected giving a total number of four schools.

## RESULTS

**Question 1:** To what extent can women in Nigeria have access to and engage in higher education as a means of achieving female empowerment?

Table 1: Response to the extent that women in Nigeria can have access to and engage in higher education as a means of achieving female empowerment

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	Women in Nigeria have equal access to higher education opportunities.	3.51	.806	Agreed
2.	Cultural norms in Nigeria significantly limit women's participation in higher education.	3.01	.725	Agreed
3.	Financial constraints are a major barrier to women's enrolment in Nigerian universities.	2.86	.625	Agreed
4.	Women in higher education contribute significantly to their empowerment in Nigerian society.	2.97	.782	Agreed
5.	Government policies adequately support women's access to higher education in Nigeria.	3.12	.886	Agreed
<b>Weighted Mean</b>		<b>15.47</b>		

Total mean = **15.47**

Cluster mean = **3.09**

Table 1 showed that the cluster mean of 3.09 indicated that a greater number of respondents agreed that women in Nigeria have access to and engage in higher education as a means of achieving female empowerment to a great extent. The cluster mean of 3.09 is greater than the benchmark which is 2.5 (that is,  $3.09 > 2.5$ ). In item 1, a total mean score of 3.51 with a standard deviation of 0.806 was obtained from the analysis of respondents' belief that women in Nigeria have equal access to higher education opportunities. This shows a very significant value of the mean. In item 2, a greater number of respondents agreed that cultural norms in Nigeria significantly limit women's participation in higher education, and this resulted in a mean score of 3.01, with a standard deviation of 0.725, which shows that it is statistically significant.

Also, in item 3, a greater number of respondents agreed that financial constraints are a major barrier to women's enrolment in Nigerian universities, total mean score of 2.86 with a standard deviation of 0.625 obtained from the analysis. Thus a significant mean score. In item 4, a greater number of the respondents agreed that women in higher education contribute significantly to their empowerment in Nigerian society, and these constituted a total mean score of 2.97 and standard deviation of 0.782, while in item 5, a greater number of the respondents agreed that government policies adequately support women's access to higher education in Nigeria, and these constituted a total mean score of 2.99, and standard deviation of 0.810, this shows that it is statistically significant.

**Question 2:** What are the barriers preventing women from pursuing higher education in Nigeria?

Table 2: Response to the barriers preventing women from pursuing higher education in Nigeria

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	Early marriage is a significant obstacle to women's higher education in Nigeria.	3.11	.801	Agreed
2.	Societal expectations prioritize domestic roles over education for women in Nigeria.	2.74	.915	Agreed
3.	Gender-based discrimination in educational institutions discourages women from pursuing higher education.	3.29	.638	Agreed
4.	Lack of female role models in academia limits women's aspirations for higher education.	3.16	.782	Agreed
5.	Women in Nigeria face more financial challenges than men when accessing higher education.	3.15	.769	Agreed
<b>Weighted Mean</b>		<b>15.45</b>		

Total mean = **15.45**

Cluster mean = **3.09**

Table 2 showed that the cluster mean of 3.09 indicated that a greater number of respondents agreed that there are barriers preventing women from pursuing higher education in Nigeria. The cluster mean of 3.09 is greater than the benchmark which is 2.5 (that is,  $3.09 > 2.5$ ). In item 1, a total mean score of 3.11 with a standard deviation of 0.801 was obtained from the analysis of respondents' belief that early marriage is a significant obstacle to women's higher education in Nigeria. This shows a very significant value of the mean. In item 2, a greater number of respondents agreed that societal expectations prioritize domestic roles over education for women in Nigeria, and this resulted in a mean score of 2.74, with a standard deviation of 0.915, which shows that it is statistically significant.

Also, in item 3, a greater number of respondents agreed that gender-based discrimination in educational institutions discourages women from pursuing higher education, A total mean score of 3.29 with a standard deviation of 0.638 was obtained from the analysis. Thus a significant mean score. In item 4, a greater number of the respondents agreed that lack of female role models in academia limits women's aspirations for higher education, and these constituted a total mean score of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.782, while in item 5, a greater number of the respondents agreed that women in Nigeria face more financial challenges than men when accessing higher education, and these constituted a total mean score of 3.15 and standard deviation of 0.769, this is statistically significant.

**Question 3:** What are the advantages of women's empowerment in improving nation's economy?

Table 3: Response to the advantages of women's empowerment in improving nation's economy

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	Empowered women significantly contribute to economic growth in Nigeria.	3.01	.757	Agreed
2.	Women's education leads to better decision-making and resource management at the community level.	3.27	.840	Agreed
3.	Educated women are more likely to invest in the health and education of their children.	3.35	.872	Agreed
4.	Empowering women through education reduces poverty in Nigeria.	3.29	.780	Agree
5.	Increasing women's participation in higher education enhances workplace productivity in Nigeria.	2.98	.817	Agree
<b>Weighted Mean</b>		<b>15.90</b>		

Total mean = **15.90**

Cluster mean = **3.18**

Table 3 showed that the cluster mean of 3.18 indicated that a greater number of respondents agreed that there are advantages of women's empowerment in improving nation's economy. The cluster mean of 3.18 is greater than the benchmark which is 2.5 (that is,  $3.18 > 2.5$ ). In item 1, a total mean score of 3.01 with a standard deviation of 0.757 was obtained from the analysis of respondents' belief that empowered women significantly contribute to economic growth in Nigeria. This shows a very significant value of the mean. In item 2, a greater number of respondents agreed that women's education leads to better decision-making and resource management at the community level, and this resulted in a mean score of 3.27, with a standard deviation of 0.840, which shows that it is statistically significant.

Also, in item 3, a greater number of respondents agreed that educated women are more likely to invest in the health and education of their children, a total mean score of 3.35 with a standard deviation of 0.872 was obtained from the analysis. Thus a significant mean score. In item 4, a greater number of the respondents agreed that empowering women through education reduces poverty in Nigeria, and these constituted a total mean score of 3.29 and standard deviation of 0.780, while in item 5, a greater number of the respondents agreed that increasing women's participation in higher education enhances workplace productivity in Nigeria, and these constituted a total mean score of 2.98, and standard deviation of 0.817, this is statistically significant.

**Question 4:** What is the level of economic improvement and research capacity of women empowerment through higher education?

Table 4: Response to the level of economic improvement and research capacity of women empowerment through higher education

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	Women's empowerment through higher education enhances Nigeria's global research capacity.	3.21	.618	Agreed
2.	Women educated at the tertiary level significantly influence innovation in Nigeria.	3.14	.742	Agreed
3.	Economic growth in Nigeria is directly linked to the higher education of women.	2.87	.743	Agreed
4.	Investments in women's education led to long-term economic sustainability in Nigeria.	2.90	.697	Agree
5.	Empowered women are more likely to start businesses and create jobs in Nigeria.	2.85	.798	Agree
<b>Weighted Mean</b>		<b>14.97</b>		

Total mean = **14.97**

Cluster mean = **2.99**

Table 3 showed that the cluster mean of 2.99 indicated that a greater number of respondents agreed to the level of economic improvement and research capacity of women empowerment through higher education. The cluster mean of 2.99 is greater than the benchmark which is 2.5 (that is,  $2.99 > 2.5$ ). In item 1, a total mean score of 3.21 with a standard deviation of 0.618 was obtained from the analysis of respondents' belief that women's empowerment through higher education enhances Nigeria's global research capacity. This shows a very significant value of the mean. In item 2, a greater number of respondents agreed that women educated at the tertiary level significantly influence innovation in Nigeria, and this resulted in a mean score of 3.14, with a standard deviation of 0.742, which shows that it is statistically significant.

Also, in item 3, a greater number of respondents agreed that economic growth in Nigeria is directly linked to the higher education of women. A total mean score of 2.87 with a standard deviation of 0.743 was obtained from the analysis. Thus a significant mean score. In item 4, a greater number of the respondents agreed that investments in women's education led to long-term economic sustainability in Nigeria, and these constituted a total mean score of 2.90 and standard deviation of 0.697, while in item 5, a greater number of the respondents agreed that empowered women are more likely to start businesses and create jobs in Nigeria, and these constituted a total mean score of 2.85, and standard deviation of 0.798, this is statistically significant.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the role of higher education in empowering women to improve Nigeria's economic framework and research proficiency. The data indicate that despite a consistent rise in women's enrolment in higher education in Nigeria over the last decade, considerable gender gaps persist. Urban regions typically exhibit elevated levels of female enrolment in postsecondary education compared to rural areas, where educational access is constrained by infrastructural, cultural, and economic obstacles. Women pursuing higher education exhibit significant enhancements in confidence, skill acquisition, and leadership capabilities, hence fostering empowerment in personal and professional spheres.

The study identified multiple obstacles that hinder women in Nigeria from attaining higher education. Ingrained patriarchal beliefs usually favour male education over female education, with early marriage and household duties sometimes disrupting girls' educational paths. The expense of higher education continues to be exorbitant for several families, especially for women, who may be regarded as a less advantageous long-term investment relative to their male counterparts. The findings align with the perspective of Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb (2013) regarding the obstacles to women's advancement, indicating that women's roles and responsibilities may hinder their progress within a firm. Simsek (2020) argued that the assumption that women should prioritise their children and the unintentional discrimination they face may hinder their career advancement.

Moreover, the research indicated that the empowering of women via higher education produces several social and economic advantages. Women with greater education are more inclined to engage in the workforce, attain elevated salaries, and enhance both home and national economic stability. Educated women are more equipped to take on leadership positions in their communities, workplaces, and governments, therefore promoting more inclusive and egalitarian society. Women possessing advanced education make substantial contributions to research and development initiatives, tackling local issues and fostering innovation in sectors such as health, agriculture, and technology. The findings support American Association of University Women (AAUW, 2016) study on attributes of a leader in addition to the process to accomplish managerial roles are currently centered on an obsolete male model that blocks women away. The association also identified outdated preconceptions as a hindrance to leadership.

Higher education is essential for promoting economic growth by providing women with skills that improve their productivity and inventiveness. As women get educational opportunities, they enhance a diversified workforce that fortifies Nigeria's economic resiliency. Women entrepreneurs possessing advanced education are more adept at securing financial resources, managing enterprises, and fostering innovation across diverse sectors.



Furthermore, enhancing women's participation in higher education significantly improves Nigeria's research competencies. Increasing the number of female researchers provides the nation with a wider skill pool and various viewpoints, hence improving problem-solving and creativity. Fields such as maternity health, education, and poverty alleviation get significant advantages from the distinctive perspectives and lived experiences of women. To properly harness this potential, institutional frameworks must aggressively advocate for gender parity in research funding, mentorship initiatives, and academic leadership. Consistent with these findings, Sindell and Shamberger (2016) asserted that women are increasingly entering the paid workforce and ascending the administrative hierarchy, despite evidence indicating that their standing remains inferior to that of men. An unprecedented number of women are entering the workforce, while colonisation and the advent of formal (Western) education have transformed Nigeria's social structure and ignited a significant, albeit quiet, revolution.

## CONCLUSION

This study underscores the essential function of higher education as a transformative instrument for empowering women in Nigeria and improving the nation's economic framework and research proficiency. The research highlights that although women in Nigeria have progressively attained access to higher education, considerable discrepancies remain due to societal, socioeconomic, and systemic obstacles. These impediments, such as gender stereotypes, early marriages, insufficient finance, and poor infrastructural development, hinder numerous women from fully pursuing and participating in higher education.

Secondly, the research demonstrates that dismantling these obstacles has extensive advantages, not alone for individual women but also for the nation at large. Empowering women through higher education promotes personal growth, financial autonomy, and leadership capabilities. Empowered women play a crucial role in alleviating poverty, enhancing family welfare, and fortifying societal frameworks, thereby facilitating advancement on both micro and macro scales. This research illustrates the beneficial association between women's empowerment and national economic advancement. When women possess advanced education, they engage actively in labour markets, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Their improved research skills tackle local and global concerns, establishing Nigeria as a more competitive entity in the knowledge-based economy.

Ultimately, women's higher education serves not just as a means for gender equality but also as a stimulus for national development. Mitigating the identified obstacles and implementing policies that enhance equal access to education will bolster Nigeria's economic development, enrich its research environment, and empower women to drive transformational change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Nigerian government should implement measures that ensure equal access to higher education for women, including specific scholarships and grants for women, especially in rural and neglected regions. Nationwide campaigns should be conducted to create awareness of the significance of higher education for women, highlighting its contribution to economic empowerment and societal advancement.
- ii. The government should enhance funding alternatives for women via scholarships, low-interest student loans, and stipends to alleviate the financial burden of higher education. They should implement and enforce anti-discrimination rules to address gender prejudices in academic institutions.
- iii. Entrepreneurship training must be integrated into higher education curricula to empower women to establish their own enterprises and enhance Nigeria's economic development. Additionally, mentorship and leadership initiatives linking female students with accomplished women professionals and academics should be instituted to motivate and direct them.
- iv. Research grants should be designated exclusively for women to promote their involvement in academic and industrial research domains. Furthermore, national and worldwide research networks of women researchers should be developed to facilitate knowledge-sharing and foster creative solutions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this research sincerely appreciate and acknowledge the Tertiary Education Fund ( TetFund) for sponsoring this institutional Based Research (IBR). Furthermore, the Vice chancellor of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere – Ekiti, ensured the environment was research – friendly. At the same time, the TetFund Office, BOUESTI, Centre for Research and Development (CERAD), BOUESTI have been immensely committed to the eventual success of this research. We are grateful.

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