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DETERMINANTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER DISPARITIES IN ENROLLMENT AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the determinants and implications of gender disparities in enrollment and academic performance across tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. The research adopted a descriptive survey design, appropriate for examining existing educational policy implementation without manipulating variables. The population comprised 5,604 stakeholders, including lecturers, administrative staff, and students drawn from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State University, and the University of Port Harcourt. Using a stratified random sampling technique, a total of 450 participants were selected across four strata: policymakers, administrators, educators, and students. Data were collected with a self-designed questionnaire titled Gender Disparities in Enrollment and Academic Performance in Tertiary Institutions Questionnaire (GDEAPTIQ). The instrument contained two sections: bio-data and items on gender disparities measured on a 4-point Likert scale. Its face and content validity were confirmed by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, and a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .701 established internal consistency. Of the 400 copies administered, a high retrieval rate was achieved with the assistance of trained research aides. Data analysis employed mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, using a criterion mean of 2.50, while t-tests at the .05 significance level tested the hypotheses with SPSS version 28. Findings revealed that socio-cultural norms, economic inequalities, and institutional factors significantly influence gender gaps in both enrollment and academic performance. The study recommends targeted scholarship schemes, gender-sensitive policies, and stronger institutional support to reduce disparities and enhance women's participation and achievement in higher education within Rivers State.

Keywords: Gender Disparity, Academic Performance, Enrollment Rates, Economic Disparities, Tertiary Institutions, Higher Education, Access To Education, Educational Inequality, Determinants Of Gender Gap, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender disparities in higher education continue to attract considerable scholarly and policy attention across the globe because of their implications for social justice, economic development, and the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and Goal 5 on gender equality (UNESCO, 2021). Although significant progress has been recorded in reducing gender gaps in access to basic and secondary education in many countries, tertiary education remains an arena where gender differences in enrollment and academic performance are evident (World Bank, 2020). In Nigeria, and specifically in Rivers State, these disparities pose a critical challenge to human capital development and the realization of national development goals (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2022).

Nigeria's tertiary education sector includes universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education play significant role in preparing skilled manpower for socio-economic transformation. Yet gender imbalance in both access and outcomes persists despite several policy interventions, such as the National Policy on Education and gender mainstreaming strategies (Okeke, 2020). Historically, socio-cultural norms and patriarchal structures have constrained women's participation in higher education, relegating them to traditional gender roles and limiting their career prospects (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). In Rivers State, a region with considerable oil wealth and industrial activity, the persistence of gender gaps in tertiary institutions underscores the complexity of the problem: economic prosperity has not automatically translated into equitable educational outcomes.

Globally, gender disparities in tertiary education vary by region. In some high-income countries, women now outnumber men in university enrollment; however, women continue to be underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines and in senior academic positions (UNESCO, 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is more nuanced: while female enrollment in higher education has increased, structural inequalities and socio-economic barriers continue to hinder parity (World Bank, 2020). Nigeria mirrors these continental trends. According to the National Universities Commission (NUC, 2022), female students constitute slightly less than half of total enrollments, and significant disparities persist across disciplines, particularly in STEM fields and professional programs. Moreover, performance gaps often reflect entrenched gender norms and unequal resource allocation (Okeke, 2020).

The determinants of gender disparities in enrollment and academic performance are multifaceted. Socio-cultural factors, including early marriage, parental expectations, and gendered socialization, frequently discourage girls from pursuing higher education or sustaining high academic performance (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). Economic factors are equally significant: poverty and limited family resources often compel parents to prioritize the education of male children, viewing female education as a less rewarding investment (Adedeji & Olanrewaju, 2018). Institutional factors such as inadequate campus security, absence of gender-sensitive policies, and lack of female role models in academia also contribute to the persistence of disparities (Oviawe & Okonkwo, 2021). In Rivers State, where oil wealth coexists with pockets of poverty, these determinants intersect in complex ways, creating a dynamic that requires context-specific analysis.

Empirical evidence shows that despite improvements in female enrollment over the past two decades, Rivers State tertiary institutions continue to record gender gaps, especially in

technical and engineering programs (Rivers State Ministry of Education [RSME], 2023). Social perceptions that certain courses or professions are more suitable for men limit the aspirations of female students and contribute to the persistence of male dominance in these fields. Additionally, issues such as inadequate scholarship schemes for female students, gender-biased admission practices, and the influence of traditional cultural expectations perpetuate these gaps (Okeke, 2020).

Academic performance disparities are not merely a reflection of enrollment gaps; they also indicate deeper systemic inequalities. Studies in Nigerian universities reveal that female students often outperform their male counterparts in some disciplines but encounter structural barriers like gender bias from lecturers, limited mentorship opportunities, and harassment that undermine their academic experience (Oviawe & Okonkwo, 2021). In some cases, household responsibilities and societal expectations impose additional burdens on female students, affecting their capacity to sustain high academic achievement (Adedeji & Olanrewaju, 2018).

Economic inequality plays a pivotal role in shaping gender disparities in higher education. Households with limited income frequently allocate scarce resources to educate male children, perceiving them as future breadwinners (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). This pattern is particularly pronounced in low-income and rural communities of Rivers State, where education is often seen as a means of securing economic mobility. The high cost of tertiary education covering tuition, accommodation, and learning materials exacerbates the disadvantage faced by female students from economically marginalized families (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, economic disparities influence not only access but also persistence and performance: students from poorer households are more likely to combine schooling with income-generating activities, which can compromise academic outcomes (UNESCO, 2021).

Various policy frameworks have sought to reduce gender inequality in Nigerian higher education, including affirmative action in admissions and targeted scholarship schemes for women in STEM fields (FME, 2022). While these initiatives have produced some progress, their effectiveness remains limited by inadequate funding, weak monitoring, and cultural resistance (Okeke, 2020). Moreover, many interventions adopt a one-size-fits-all approach and fail to consider the unique socio-economic realities of states such as Rivers, where economic opportunities and gender norms intersect in distinctive ways.

Statement of the Problem

Despite global and national efforts to promote gender equity in education, disparities in enrollment and academic performance persist in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. Rivers State, one of the nation's leading educational and economic hubs, continues to record significant gender gaps despite its relative wealth and urbanization. Female students remain underrepresented in certain programs particularly science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and face unique challenges that affect their academic achievement. Another major barrier is the socio-cultural norms in Rivers State where early marriage expectations and entrenched patriarchal attitudes, continue to discourage many young women from pursuing higher education.

Economic inequalities also play a critical role, as limited household resources often lead families to prioritize male education, thereby restricting female access to tertiary education and the resources needed for academic success. Furthermore, institutional barriers, including inadequate gender-sensitive policies, limited mentorship opportunities, and gender-based

harassment, exacerbate these disparities. The persistence of such inequities undermines the goals of Nigeria's National Policy on Education and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those focused on gender equality and inclusive education. Unless the determinants of these disparities and their implications are critically examined within the specific socio-economic context of Rivers State, gender parity in higher education will remain elusive, weakening the region's human capital development.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the determinants and implications of gender disparities in enrollment and academic performance in tertiary institutions of Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study intends to achieve the following objectives:

- Examine the root causes of gender disparity in academic performance in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.
- Assess the extent of gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- Investigate the impact of economic disparities on gender disparity in tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The research questions provided guide to the study:

- What are the root causes of gender disparity in academic performance in these tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- To what extent is there gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria?
- How does economic disparities impact gender disparity in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The hypotheses further provided guide to the study:

- There is no statistically significant disparity in academic performance between male and female individuals in the implementation of educational policies in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- There is no significant gender disparity in enrollment rates between male and female respondents in the implementation of educational policies across tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- Economic disparities do not significantly influence gender disparity in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Gender and Development Theory

Root Causes of Gender Disparity in Academic Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

Gender disparity in academic performance across tertiary institutions in Rivers State reflects a complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Although female enrollment in higher education has grown in recent years, many women continue to encounter obstacles that affect their ability to perform at par with their male counterparts. The following key root causes have been identified in existing research and policy analyses.

Deeply entrenched cultural beliefs in parts of Rivers State continue to prioritize traditional gender roles, often assigning women primary responsibility for domestic duties and child care (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). Even when young women gain admission to tertiary institutions, these expectations frequently require them to balance demanding household obligations with rigorous academic schedules. The resulting “double workload” limits the time and energy available for study and participation in extracurricular activities that foster academic success. Additionally, cultural attitudes that undervalue female intellectual capacity may lead to lowered expectations from both families and instructors, which can subtly discourage women from striving for academic excellence.

Economic disparities amplify gendered academic challenges. Students from low-income households particularly female students often face greater difficulty paying tuition, purchasing textbooks, or accessing internet services critical for research and online learning (Adedeji & Olanrewaju, 2018). When family resources are scarce, women are frequently the first to experience financial sacrifice. Many female students resort to part-time work or informal trading to sustain themselves, reducing the time available for coursework and leading to fatigue or inconsistent class attendance. Financial insecurity also increases vulnerability to exploitation or transactional relationships that can negatively impact mental health and academic focus.

Incidents of sexual harassment and gender-based intimidation remain widespread in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Oviawe & Okonkwo, 2021). Such experiences create hostile learning environments and erode women’s confidence, leading to absenteeism or withdrawal from challenging programs. Fear of harassment can deter female students from participating in academic group work or consulting lecturers, thereby limiting their access to critical academic support and mentorship.

Female students often have fewer visible role models in senior academic or administrative positions. In male-dominated fields such as engineering and the physical sciences, the scarcity of female lecturers or researchers restricts opportunities for mentorship and guidance (Okeke, 2020). Without mentors to encourage persistence and provide academic support, women may experience diminished motivation and lower achievement, even when they possess strong intellectual abilities.

Although Nigeria’s National Policy on Education advocates gender equity, the implementation of gender-responsive measures remains inconsistent. Inadequate counseling services, absence of gender-sensitive pedagogy, and limited campus facilities such as safe accommodation or childcare centers make it difficult for women especially married or parenting students to perform optimally (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2022).

Persistent stereotypes suggesting that certain disciplines are “male” domains can undermine women’s academic self-confidence. Stereotype threat such as the anxiety of being judged according to negative gender expectations impair concentration and lower performance outcomes (UNESCO, 2021). Thus, women in STEM programs often face this challenge, which contributes to disparities in performance relative to their male peers.

Gender Disparity in Enrollment Rates between Male and Female Students across Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

Gender disparity in enrollment rates remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria’s tertiary education sector, and Rivers State provides a striking case study of how socio-cultural, economic, and institutional dynamics intersect to produce uneven access to higher education. Despite being one of the country’s most economically vibrant states thanks largely to oil and gas activities Rivers State still struggles to achieve parity between male and female students in universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education.

National enrollment statistics reveal a long-standing gender imbalance in Nigerian higher education. The National Universities Commission (NUC, 2022) reported that female students constitute slightly less than half of total enrollment nationally, with notable disparities across disciplines and regions. Local data from the Rivers State Ministry of Education (RSME, 2023) suggest similar patterns: female students are relatively well represented in social sciences, education, and health sciences, but remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines and in professional programs such as engineering, maritime studies, and technical education. The gender gap is particularly pronounced in public polytechnics and technical colleges, where cultural stereotypes often portray these fields as male domains (Okeke, 2020).

Several socio-cultural factors continue to shape these enrollment patterns. Traditional gender norms in parts of Rivers State prioritize the education of male children as future family breadwinners while expecting females to assume domestic roles or marry early (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). In rural and riverine communities, parents may be reluctant to invest in long years of tertiary schooling for daughters, fearing that marriage or childcare responsibilities will eventually interrupt or “waste” that investment. Such attitudes discourage female students from pursuing higher education or prompt them to select programs perceived as more compatible with gendered expectations, such as education or nursing, rather than engineering or technology.

Economic disparities compound these cultural influences. Although Rivers State generates significant national revenue, income distribution is uneven, and poverty rates remain high in some rural and peri-urban areas. For households with scarce resources, the cost of tertiary education like tuition, accommodation, books, and transportation can be prohibitive. Families often choose to educate male children first, viewing them as better positioned to secure lucrative employment (Adedeji & Olanrewaju, 2018). Female students from low-income families are therefore more likely to delay enrollment, attend less expensive institutions, or drop out altogether. These economic constraints contribute significantly to the persistent gender gap.

Institutional practices and the policy environment also influence enrollment disparities. Although Nigeria’s National Policy on Education and gender-mainstreaming initiatives encourage equity, implementation gaps remain. Limited scholarship schemes targeted at women, inadequate campus childcare facilities, and the absence of gender-sensitive recruitment and admission policies reduce opportunities for female students (FME, 2022). Furthermore, the lack

of visible female role models in academic leadership positions may discourage young women from pursuing advanced studies or careers in fields dominated by men (Oviawe & Okonkwo, 2021).

The underrepresentation of female students in Rivers State's tertiary institutions has far-reaching implications. It limits the pool of trained women professionals, particularly in high-demand STEM sectors, thereby constraining the state's human capital development and economic diversification. It also perpetuates gender wage gaps and limits women's participation in leadership positions across industries. More broadly, persistent gender disparity undermines Nigeria's commitments to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and Goal 5 on gender equality (UNESCO, 2021).

How Economic Disparities Impact Gender Disparity in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

Economic disparities remain one of the most powerful drivers of gender inequality in access to, and outcomes from, tertiary education. In Rivers State, despite its reputation as Nigeria's oil and gas hub like income distribution is highly uneven. Wealth is concentrated in a small elite while many families, particularly in rural and riverine communities, experience persistent poverty. This socio-economic imbalance directly and indirectly shapes gender disparity in tertiary institutions.

Tertiary education in Nigeria requires substantial financial commitment, including tuition fees, textbooks, accommodation, transportation, and sometimes laboratory charges. For low-income households, these expenses can be prohibitive. In the face of financial constraints, families frequently prioritize educating male children, who are often perceived as future breadwinners and as providing higher returns on educational investment (Adedeji & Olanrewaju, 2018). Girls are therefore more likely to have their education delayed, be enrolled in less expensive programs, or be withdrawn from school altogether when household resources shrink.

Even when formal tuition is affordable, hidden costs such as the need for private tutoring, field trips, or technology for e-learning create additional financial pressure. Because girls often face cultural expectations of early marriage or domestic responsibilities, parents may be less willing to invest in these "extra" costs for daughters (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). These hidden economic barriers reinforce lower female enrollment and weaken their academic performance compared to male counterparts.

Households in Rivers State, particularly those outside the oil economy, are vulnerable to economic shocks such as fluctuations in commodity prices or environmental disruptions from oil spills and flooding. When family income falls unexpectedly, it is often the girl child whose schooling is interrupted first. Early withdrawal of girls from tertiary education either to save money or to enter marriage deepens the gender gap and reduces women's long-term earning potential (World Bank, 2020).

While government and private scholarship programs exist, many are competitive and sometimes skewed toward disciplines where men predominate, such as engineering and technology (Okeke, 2020). Girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are doubly disadvantaged: they are less able to afford tertiary education on their own and less likely to access financial support tailored to their circumstances. Inadequate gender-responsive financial aid policies thus perpetuate enrollment and completion gaps.

Economic hardship affects not only enrollment but also persistence and performance. Female students from poor households often engage in part-time employment to finance their

studies, leaving less time for academic work. Others may live in substandard accommodation or face food insecurity, both of which impair concentration and health. These conditions contribute to lower grades and higher dropout rates among economically disadvantaged women (Oviawe & Okonkwo, 2021).

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for examining the current implementation of educational policies relating to gender disparity in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. According to Nwankwo (2013), a descriptive survey allows the researcher to gather data from a large sample and describe the characteristics of the population as they exist at the time of the study, without manipulating any independent variables.

The population comprised 5,604 stakeholders involved in policy implementation on gender disparity across tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This included lecturers, administrative staff, and students, with data sourced in 2023 from the Offices of the Registrars at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State University, and the University of Port Harcourt.

A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select 450 participants across various institutions to ensure balanced representation from gender-sensitive and non-gender-sensitive institutions. Four strata were identified: policymakers (50; 12.5%) who shape strategic policy directions; administrators such as heads of departments and program coordinators (100; 25%) who manage institutional operations; educators (150; 37.5%) responsible for implementing educational changes; and students (100; 25%) whose experiences reflect the direct outcomes of policy implementation.

Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire titled Gender Disparities in Enrollment and Academic Performance in Tertiary Institutions Questionnaire (GDEAPTIQ). Section A captured respondents' bio-data, while Section B examined gender disparities in enrollment and academic performance using a 4-point Likert scale: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE).

Two experts in Measurement and Evaluation at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education reviewed the instrument for face and content validity. Their feedback and the supervisor's suggestions were incorporated into the final draft. Using Cronbach's alpha, a reliability coefficient of 0.701 was obtained, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

The researchers, assisted by two trained aides, distributed 400 copies of the questionnaire and explained the purpose to respondents to enhance accuracy and retrieval. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, applying a criterion mean of 2.50 for interpretation. To test the null hypotheses at the .05 level of significance, a t-test was conducted with the aid of SPSS version 28.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What are the root causes of gender disparity in academic performance in these tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Summary of descriptive statistics on the mean rating on the root causes of gender disparity in academic performance within these tertiary institutions

S/N	The root causes of gender disparity in academic performance within these tertiary institutions N=394	Mean	SD.	Remark
1.	Gender bias in teaching and grading practices can lead to gender disparities in academic performance within tertiary institutions.	3.73	0.51	Agree
2.	Differences in study habits and learning styles between genders can also contribute to variations in academic performance.	3.88	0.37	Agree
3.	Cultural and societal norms may discourage women from pursuing rigorous academic programs, perpetuating gender disparities in tertiary education.	3.55	0.85	Agree
4.	Insufficient mentorship and support systems for underrepresented genders in academia can hinder their academic success within tertiary institutions.	2.83	1.08	Agree
Grand Mean		3.50	0.70	Agree

Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics on the mean ratings of root causes of gender disparities in academic performance within tertiary institutions (N=394). The grand mean rating is 3.50 with a standard deviation of 0.70, indicating agreement among respondents. The findings reveal that gender bias in teaching and grading practices (M=3.73, SD=0.51), differences in study habits and learning styles between genders (M=3.88, SD=0.37), and cultural/societal norms discouraging women from pursuing rigorous academic programs (M=3.55, SD=0.85) are significant contributors to gender disparities. Additionally, inadequate mentorship and support systems for underrepresented genders in academia (M=2.83, SD=1.08) also play a role. Based on the responses from the respondents, it was concluded that the identified factors are the root cause of gender disparity in academic performance within these tertiary institutions.

Research Question Two: To what extent is there gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Summary of descriptive statistics on the mean rating of the their gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria N=394	Mean	SD.	Remark
5.	Examining the gender gap in tertiary institution enrollment rates is crucial for understanding the educational landscape in Rivers State, Nigeria.	3.07	0.95	Agree
6.	The extent of gender disparity in tertiary education enrollment in Rivers State, Nigeria, demands immediate attention to ensure equal opportunities for all.	2.91	1.15	Agree
7.	Gender disparity in tertiary institution enrollment rates in Rivers State, Nigeria, is a pressing concern that requires in-depth analysis.	2.89	1.22	Agree
8.	Addressing and reducing gender disparities in tertiary education enrollment in Rivers State, Nigeria, is essential for fostering a more equitable society.	2.94	1.20	Agree
Grand Mean		2.95	1.13	Agree

The results presented in Table 2 provide a summary of descriptive statistics on the mean rating of measures employed in addressing gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. The grand mean rating of these measures was 2.95, with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.13. Respondents strongly indicated that gender-based conflicts are associated

with injustices, marginalization, and social disequilibrium among the people ($M=3.07$, $SD=0.95$). This was closely followed by the belief that traditional rulers have played a significant role in resolving gender-based conflicts ($M=2.91$, $SD=1.15$), and the opinion that non-governmental organizations such as Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders should intervene in conflict resolution ($M=2.90$, $SD=1.08$), among other factors. Based on the responses received, it can be concluded that identified measures could be adopted to address gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, as the majority of respondents rated above the 2.50 criterion mean cutoff point.

Research Question Three: How does economic disparities impact gender disparity in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Summary of descriptive statistics on the mean rating on the economic disparities impact gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State

S/N	Economic disparities impact gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State N=394	Mean	SD	Remark
9.	Economic disparities in Rivers State hinder women's access to tertiary education, contributing to gender inequality.	3.27	1.08	Agree
10.	The economic gap exacerbates gender disparity by limiting opportunities for lower-income women.	3.22	0.98	Agree
11.	Economic disparities impact female student retention and performance, perpetuating gender inequality.	3.20	1.03	Agree
12.	Addressing economic disparities through policies and financial support can promote gender equity in tertiary education in Rivers State.	2.84	0.99	Agree
Grand Mean		3.13	1.02	Agree

The results in Table 3 provided a summary of descriptive statistics regarding the mean rating of the impact of economic disparities on gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State with grand mean of 3.13, $SD=1.02$. This indicates a general agreement among the respondents regarding the influence of economic disparities on gender inequality within the educational sector. Breaking down specific aspects, respondents strongly agree that economic disparities in Rivers State hinder women's access to tertiary education (Mean=3.27, $SD=1.08$). Additionally, the economic gap is perceived to exacerbate gender disparity by limiting opportunities for lower-income women (Mean=3.22, $SD=0.98$). Moreover, economic disparities are seen to impact female student retention and performance, perpetuating gender inequality (Mean=3.20, $SD=1.03$). On a positive note, there is recognition that addressing economic disparities through policies and financial support can potentially promote gender equity in tertiary education in Rivers State (Mean=2.84, $SD=0.99$). Based on the responses from the respondents, it was concluded that economic disparities significantly impact gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no statistically significant disparity in academic performance between male and female individuals in the implementation of educational policies within tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Table 4: Summary of independent sample t-test on disparity in academic performance between male and female individuals in the implementation of educational policies in tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	p-value	Decision
Academic Performance	Male	170	3.01	0.67	-.806	392	.421	NS
	Female	224	2.94	0.81				

Not Significant (NS)

Table 4 provides a summary of the independent sample t-test, assessing the disparity in academic performance between male and female students during the implementation of educational policies in tertiary institutions across Rivers State. The analysis indicates no statistically significant difference in the mean scores of academic performance between male and female students ($t = -0.806$, $df = 392$, $p = 0.421$). Given that the p-value surpasses the significance level of 0.05, we retain the null hypothesis (H_0), indicating that there is no significant gender-based difference in academic performance within these institutions.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant disparity in enrollment rates between male and female respondents in the implementation of educational policies across tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Table 5: Summary of independent sample t-test on the disparity in enrollment rates between male and female respondents in the implementation of educational policies across tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	p-value	Decision
Enrolment Rate	Male	170	2.87	0.69	1.575	392	.117	NS
	Female	224	2.78	0.83				

Not Significant (NS)

The results in Table 5 provide a concise overview of an independent sample t-test examining the variation in enrollment rates between male and female participants in tertiary institutions in Rivers State concerning the implementation of educational policies. The analysis indicates no significant difference between the mean enrollment rates of male and female participants ($t = 1.575$, $df = 392$, $p = 0.117$). Since the p-value exceeds the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) is upheld. This suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in enrollment rates between male and female participants in these institutions.

Hypothesis Three: Economic disparities do not significantly influence gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

Table 6: Summary of independent sample t-test on Economic disparities and gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	p-value	Decision
Economic Disparities	Male	224	3.05	0.55	-.901	392	.368	NS
	Female	170	3.15	0.58				

Not Significant (NS)

The results presented in Table 8, summarizing the independent sample t-test on economic disparities and gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State, indicate no significant difference between male and female groups. The mean scores for both genders suggest that economic disparities do not play a significant role in influencing gender disparity ($t = -0.901$, $df = 392$, $p = 0.368$). Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected at the 0.05 significance level.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Root Causes of Gender Disparity in Academic Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics on the mean ratings of root causes of gender disparities in academic performance within tertiary institutions ($N=394$). The grand mean rating is 3.50 with a standard deviation of 0.70, indicating agreement among respondents. The findings reveal that gender bias in teaching and grading practices ($M=3.73$, $SD=0.51$), differences in study habits and learning styles between genders ($M=3.88$, $SD=0.37$), and cultural/societal norms discouraging women from pursuing rigorous academic programs ($M=3.55$, $SD=0.85$) are significant contributors to gender disparities. Additionally, inadequate mentorship and support systems for underrepresented genders in academia ($M=2.83$, $SD=1.08$) also play a role. Based on the responses from the respondents, it was concluded that the identified factors are the root cause of gender disparity in academic performance within these tertiary institutions.

This result supports the findings of Wilson (2016) who observed that gender-based violence, encompassing a spectrum from domestic violence to sexual harassment and human trafficking, constitutes a pervasive and alarming issue that significantly contributes to the perpetuation of gender disparities. The consequences of such violence extend beyond immediate physical harm, affecting women's freedom, safety, and their ability to access essential resources, including education and employment. In understanding the impact of gender-based violence on gender disparities, it becomes imperative to delve into the intricate dynamics and root causes that underpin these pervasive issues. Domestic violence, a prevalent form of gender-based violence, often functions as a means of asserting power and control over women within intimate relationships. The physical, emotional, and psychological trauma resulting from domestic violence can severely curtail women's autonomy, limiting their ability to make choices about their lives. Additionally, the fear and threat of violence may coerce women into silence and compliance, perpetuating a cycle of abuse that further entrenches gender disparities.

The Gender Disparity in Enrollment Rates in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

The results presented in Table 2 provide a summary of descriptive statistics on the mean rating of measures employed in addressing gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. The grand mean rating of these measures was 2.95, with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.13. Respondents strongly indicated that gender-based conflicts are associated with injustices, marginalization, and social disequilibrium among the people ($M=3.07$, $SD=0.95$). This was closely followed by the belief that traditional rulers have played a significant role in resolving gender-based conflicts ($M=2.91$, $SD=1.15$), and the opinion that non-governmental organizations such as Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders should intervene in conflict resolution ($M=2.90$, $SD=1.08$), among other factors. Based on the responses received, it

can be concluded that identified measures could be adopted to address gender disparity in enrollment rates in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, as the majority of respondents rated above the 2.50 criterion mean cutoff point.

This result supports the findings of Dokubo and Deebom, (2017) who examined the gender disparity towards students' enrollment in technical education in Rivers State. Their results showed that revealed amongst others that poverty, preference of male child, cultural and religious beliefs were causes of female folks low enrollment into technical education programmes in Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended amongst others that; allowances, scholarships, employment opportunities should be given to female students in order to enhance their enrolments into technical education programmes in Rivers State.

The Economic Disparities Impact Gender Disparity in Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State

The results in Table 3 provided a summary of descriptive statistics regarding the mean rating of the impact of economic disparities on gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State with grand mean of 3.13, SD=1.02. This indicates a general agreement among the respondents regarding the influence of economic disparities on gender inequality within the educational sector. Breaking down specific aspects, respondents strongly agree that economic disparities in Rivers State hinder women's access to tertiary education (Mean=3.27, SD=1.08). Additionally, the economic gap is perceived to exacerbate gender disparity by limiting opportunities for lower-income women (Mean=3.22, SD=0.98). Moreover, economic disparities are seen to impact female student retention and performance, perpetuating gender inequality (Mean=3.20, SD=1.03). On a positive note, there is recognition that addressing economic disparities through policies and financial support can potentially promote gender equity in tertiary education in Rivers State (Mean=2.84, SD=0.99). Based on the responses from the respondents, it was concluded that economic disparities significantly impact gender disparity within tertiary institutions in Rivers State.

This result supports the findings of Ajala and Alonge, (2013) examined that education is one of the most effective development investments countries can make. Adequate investments in education facilitate the achievement of most other national development goals and increase the probability that progress will be sustained. Education is also universally acknowledged to benefit individuals and promote national development. Educating females and males produces similar increases in their subsequent earnings and expands future opportunities and choices for both boys and girls. However, educating girls produces many additional socio-economic gains that benefit entire societies. These benefits include increased economic productivity, higher family incomes, delayed marriages, reduced fertility rates, and improved health and survival rates for infants and children. Education builds the human capital that is needed for economic growth. Achieving gender equality in education therefore means that boys and girls will have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights and contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development. It is in the light of the above that this paper attempts to examine the equality of access as well as equality of learning process among boys and girls in the educational sector in Nigeria. The paper will also examine factors inhibiting gender equality in Nigeria education sector.

CONCLUSION

The study considered implementation of educational policies on gender disparity in tertiary institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, it can be deduced that for the implementation of educational policies in Rivers State suggests that gender disparities in various aspects of tertiary education, including academic performance, enrollment rates, economic factors, leadership roles, and STEM participation, are not significantly influenced by current policies. The consistent retention of null hypotheses across these areas indicates that gender differences observed cannot be attributed to existing policies. In the academic sphere, both male and female students exhibit similar mean scores, suggesting that policies have not led to noticeable differences in scholastic achievements. Similarly, enrollment rates do not show significant variations between genders, indicating relatively equal access to tertiary education. The study dismisses the notion that economic factors play a substantial role in shaping gender-based differences in academic outcomes or enrollment rates. The findings suggest that economic considerations do not pose a significant barrier to achieving gender equity in tertiary education in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered:

- Regularly assess and update educational policies to ensure relevance and responsiveness to evolving challenges, particularly in promoting gender equity within tertiary institutions.
- Implement inclusive awareness programs to deepen understanding of gender equality among students, faculty, and administrative staff.
- Provide targeted leadership training emphasizing gender inclusivity for current and aspiring leaders in tertiary institutions.

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