

NAVIGATING GENDER AND LEGAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: BARRIERS AND BREAKTHROUGHS

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Abstract

In recent years, gender equality has become a concern in contemporary educational and legal discourse, particularly within legal education, which serves as the gateway to the legal profession. In Nigeria, legal education has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades. Women, who were historically marginalised in formal education and professional occupations, now constitute a substantial proportion of law students and increasingly occupy prominent positions within the legal profession. Despite these gains, significant challenges persist. Female law students, academics, and practitioners continue to face barriers arising from patriarchal social structures, gender stereotypes, economic inequalities, sexual harassment, institutional bias, limited mentorship opportunities, leadership disparities, and work-life balance pressures. This article examines the intersection of gender and legal education in Nigeria by exploring its historical development, theoretical foundations, and contemporary realities. Drawing on recent literature, policy documents, institutional reports, and international human rights frameworks, the paper evaluates both the barriers confronting women and the progress achieved in recent years. Adopting a socio-legal and interdisciplinary approach, the article argues that although women's participation in legal education and the legal profession has expanded considerably, structural inequalities continue to impede the attainment of substantive gender equality. The paper concludes that sustainable progress requires legislative reform, institutional accountability, gender-responsive educational policies, mentorship programmes, technological inclusion, and cultural transformation.

Keywords: Gender, Legal Education, Women's Rights, Gender Equality, Legal Profession, Higher Education, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The relationship between gender and education has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the past several decades. Across the world, education is recognized as one of the most effective instruments for social mobility, economic advancement, political participation, and human development. Access to quality education enhances opportunities for employment, promotes social inclusion, and contributes to the realization of fundamental human rights. Within the legal profession, education assumes an even greater significance because it prepares individuals who shape laws, administer justice, interpret constitutional provisions, and influence public policy.

Legal education occupies a unique position in society. It is not merely a process of acquiring legal knowledge; it is also a mechanism for cultivating professional ethics, critical thinking, advocacy skills, and a commitment to justice. Consequently, access to legal education directly affects who participates in legal decision-making processes and whose perspectives are represented in the administration of justice. As Nussbaum (2000) observes, educational opportunities play a critical role in enabling individuals to develop and exercise their capabilities, thereby promoting substantive equality rather than mere formal equality.

Historically, women in Nigeria experienced significant disadvantages in accessing formal education. Colonial educational policies, cultural traditions, and religious practices often prioritized male education while limiting opportunities available to women (Akinola, 2021). These inequalities extended into professional disciplines such as law, medicine, engineering, and academia. As a result, legal education and the legal profession emerged as predominantly male domains during the colonial and early post-independence periods (Odinkalu, 2021).

However, the situation has changed considerably over the past five decades. Educational expansion, democratization, urbanization, international human rights advocacy, and changing social attitudes have contributed to increased female participation in higher education generally and legal education specifically. Women now constitute a significant proportion of students in many Nigerian faculties of law and increasingly occupy influential positions in academia, judicial service, public administration, and private legal practice (International Bar Association [IBA], 2022).

Despite these achievements, gender disparities remain evident. Studies have shown that women continue to encounter challenges related to admission, retention, professional advancement, leadership representation, access to mentorship, and workplace discrimination (Okagbue, 2022). Gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms continue to shape educational and professional experiences in ways that disadvantage women. Furthermore, issues such as sexual harassment, unequal caregiving responsibilities, and economic constraints continue to affect female participation within educational institutions and professional settings (Owolabi, 2022).

Recent developments have intensified scholarly interest in gender and legal education in Nigeria. The appointment of women to leadership positions within legal institutions, increasing female enrolment in law faculties, and growing awareness of gender-sensitive educational policies have generated important debates concerning equality, inclusion, and institutional reform. At the same time, evidence suggests that significant structural barriers remain, particularly regarding leadership representation and career progression (WARD, 2025).

This article seeks to contribute to these discussions by examining the barriers and breakthroughs associated with gender and legal education in Nigeria. Specifically, it explores the historical development of women's participation in legal education, analyses relevant theoretical perspectives, and evaluates contemporary challenges and opportunities. The study further considers the implications of gender equality for legal education, professional practice, and national development.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

This section of the paper will explore some key words that are related with the subject of discussion.

2.1 Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expectations, and relationships associated with men and women within a given society. Unlike biological sex, which is determined by physiological characteristics, gender is shaped by social, cultural, political, and economic influences. Gender norms influence how individuals are expected to behave, the opportunities available to them, and the constraints they may encounter throughout their lives.

According to UNESCO (2024), gender is a dynamic social construct that affects access to resources, educational opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes. In the context of legal education, gender influences admission patterns, academic experiences, professional aspirations, and career advancement.

Understanding gender as a social construct is particularly important because it highlights that inequalities experienced by women are not inevitable consequences of biology but rather products of institutional arrangements, cultural expectations, and social practices that can be challenged and transformed.

2.2 Legal Education

Legal education encompasses the processes through which individuals acquire legal knowledge, professional skills, ethical values, and practical competencies required for participation in the legal profession. In Nigeria, legal education is generally divided into two stages: academic legal education and professional legal education.

Academic legal education is obtained through university studies leading to the award of the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) degree. Professional legal education is subsequently provided by the Nigerian Law School, culminating in admission to the Nigerian Bar (Oba, 2021).

Legal education serves multiple functions. It prepares students for legal practice, promotes understanding of legal institutions, encourages critical analysis of social problems, and contributes to the development of democratic governance. As a result, the inclusiveness of legal education has significant implications for the diversity and representativeness of the legal profession.

2.3 Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the equal enjoyment of rights, opportunities, responsibilities, and protections by all persons regardless of gender. It does not require identical treatment in all circumstances but rather seeks to eliminate discrimination and structural disadvantages that prevent individuals from realizing their full potential.

UN Women (2024) emphasizes that gender equality involves both equal access to opportunities and equitable outcomes. Within legal education, gender equality requires that women and men have equal opportunities to gain admission, participate in academic activities, access leadership positions, receive mentorship, and advance professionally.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminism remains one of the most influential theoretical approaches for analysing gender inequality within educational and professional institutions. Liberal feminists argue that women and men should enjoy equal rights and opportunities and that gender inequality largely results from discriminatory laws, policies, and social practices rather than inherent biological differences.

The works of Friedan (1963) and Nussbaum (2000) emphasize the importance of removing institutional barriers that restrict women's participation in public life. According to liberal feminist theory, educational institutions should adopt policies that promote equal access, merit-based advancement, and non-discrimination.

Applied to legal education, liberal feminism supports equal admission standards, fair recruitment practices, gender-neutral promotion criteria, and institutional safeguards against discrimination. This perspective provides a useful framework for evaluating the extent to which legal education institutions facilitate or hinder women's participation.

3.2 Radical Feminist Theory

While liberal feminism focuses on legal and institutional reforms, radical feminism examines deeper structural inequalities embedded within social systems. Radical feminists argue that patriarchal power relations permeate institutions, cultures, and social practices, often reproducing gender inequality even where formal equality exists.

From this perspective, educational institutions may unconsciously perpetuate male dominance through curriculum design, leadership structures, research priorities, and organizational cultures (Zwingel, 2016). Gender inequality therefore, cannot be addressed solely through legal reforms; broader cultural transformation is also required.

The relevance of radical feminist theory to Nigeria lies in its ability to explain why gender disparities persist despite constitutional guarantees and international commitments to equality.

3.3 Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality, developed by Crenshaw (1991), provides another important framework for understanding gender inequality. The theory recognizes that individuals experience discrimination differently depending on the interaction of multiple social identities such as gender, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, and geographical location.

In Nigeria, gender inequality often intersects with poverty, cultural practices, and regional disparities. Female students from rural communities may face challenges distinct from those encountered by women in urban centres. Similarly, women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may experience barriers that differ from those faced by their wealthier counterparts.

Intersectionality therefore encourages a more nuanced understanding of gender and legal education by recognizing the diversity of women's experiences.

4. Historical Development of Women's Participation in Legal Education in Nigeria

The history of women's participation in Nigerian legal education reflects broader struggles for educational inclusion and professional recognition. During the colonial period, educational opportunities were limited, and societal expectations generally discouraged women from pursuing higher education or professional careers (Akinola, 2021).

Colonial educational policies frequently prioritized male education, reflecting assumptions that men would serve as future administrators, professionals, and community leaders. Women, by contrast, were often expected to focus on domestic responsibilities. Consequently, female participation in professional disciplines such as law remained extremely limited.

One of the most significant milestones in this historical journey was the emergence of pioneering female legal scholars. Among these was Professor Jadesola Akande, who became Nigeria's first female Professor of Law. Her achievement challenged prevailing stereotypes concerning women's intellectual capabilities and demonstrated that women could excel within legal academia (Historical Nigeria, 2026).

Similarly, women increasingly gained visibility within legal practice and judicial service. Over time, female lawyers began attaining senior professional positions, with Chief Folake Solanke being the first female to attain the prestigious rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (Folake Solanke, 2007) while women judges contributed significantly to the development of Nigerian jurisprudence.

By the twenty-first century, women had become prominent participants within Nigerian legal education. Recent years have witnessed further breakthroughs, including the appointment of female leaders within key legal institutions. For example, the appointment of Olugbemisola Odusote as the first female Director-General of the Nigerian Law School in 2026 represents a landmark achievement in the history of legal education leadership in Nigeria (Africa Legal, 2026).

The historical trajectory of women's participation in legal education thus reveals substantial progress. Nevertheless, the persistence of structural barriers demonstrates that the struggle for gender equality remains ongoing.

5. Legal and Institutional Framework for Gender Equality in Legal Education

The advancement of gender equality within legal education in Nigeria is supported by a network of constitutional provisions, statutory instruments, international treaties, regional human rights frameworks, and policy initiatives. Collectively, these instruments establish normative standards intended to promote equal access to educational opportunities and eliminate discrimination based on gender.

5.1 The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Amended)

The Constitution remains the supreme legal instrument governing rights and obligations in Nigeria. Section 42 prohibits discrimination based on sex, religion, ethnic group, place of origin, or political opinion. This provision provides the constitutional foundation for gender equality within educational institutions and professional organizations (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Additionally, Section 17 of the Constitution emphasizes equality of opportunity and directs the State to ensure that all citizens have equal educational opportunities. Although the provisions contained within Chapter II are generally non-justiciable, they nevertheless serve as important policy directives influencing governmental action and institutional reforms.

The constitutional commitment to equality has informed educational policies aimed at expanding access to higher education and reducing barriers affecting women and other marginalized groups.

5.2 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW remains the most comprehensive international treaty addressing discrimination against women. Nigeria ratified the Convention in 1985, thereby undertaking obligations to eliminate discrimination in education, employment, political participation, and public life (United Nations, 1979).

Article 10 of CEDAW specifically requires States Parties to ensure equal access to education, scholarships, vocational guidance, and professional training. The Convention further requires governments to eliminate stereotypes concerning the roles of men and women in society.

Although Nigeria has yet to fully domesticate CEDAW through specific national legislation, the Convention continues to influence judicial reasoning, policy development, and advocacy efforts concerning gender equality.

5.3 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the law. Unlike many international treaties, the Charter has been domesticated in Nigeria through legislation and therefore forms part of Nigerian law.

The Charter reinforces constitutional guarantees of equality and provides an additional legal foundation for challenging discriminatory practices affecting women in education and employment (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2023).

5.4 Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)

The Maputo Protocol represents one of the most progressive regional instruments concerning women's rights. It requires States Parties to eliminate discrimination against women and promote equal opportunities in education, employment, political participation, and social development (African Union, 2003). The Protocol emphasizes women's rights to education and training and encourages governments to implement measures that enhance female participation in decision-making processes.

5.5 Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for promoting inclusive development. Goal 4 seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, while Goal 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls (United Nations, 2015).

The SDGs have significantly influenced educational planning and policy development in Nigeria. Many initiatives aimed at increasing female participation in higher education are linked directly to SDG targets relating to gender equality and educational access.

5.6 National Gender Policy

Nigeria's National Gender Policy seeks to mainstream gender considerations across all sectors of national development. The policy emphasizes equal access to education, leadership opportunities, economic resources, and decision-making processes (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2021).

The policy also advocates the removal of institutional barriers that restrict women's participation within educational institutions and professional organizations. While implementation challenges remain, the policy provides an important framework for advancing gender-responsive reforms.

6. Gendered Barriers in Nigerian Legal Education

Despite the existence of robust legal and policy frameworks, women continue to encounter significant obstacles within legal education. These barriers are multidimensional and often reinforce one another.

6.1 Patriarchal Cultural Norms and Social Expectations

Patriarchy remains one of the most significant barriers to gender equality in Nigeria. Patriarchal social structures assign authority and leadership primarily to men while associating women with caregiving and domestic responsibilities (Akinola, 2021).

These cultural expectations influence educational decisions, career aspirations, and professional advancement. In many communities, women continue to face pressure to prioritize marriage and family responsibilities over educational and career pursuits. Research conducted by UNESCO (2024) indicates that gender stereotypes remain a major obstacle to women's participation in higher education across many developing countries. Such stereotypes affect both self-perception and institutional attitudes toward female students and academics. Within legal education, these stereotypes may manifest in assumptions that litigation, judicial service, and legal leadership are more suitable for men than women.

6.2 Economic Barriers and Financial Constraints

Economic inequality remains a major determinant of educational access. Legal education is expensive, requiring payment of tuition fees, accommodation costs, transportation expenses, textbooks, internet access, and professional training fees.

According to the World Bank (2024), economic disadvantage disproportionately affects women and girls in developing countries. Families facing financial constraints may prioritize the education of male children, thereby limiting opportunities available to female students. The cost of attending the Nigerian Law School presents an additional challenge. Many students struggle to finance professional legal training, and female students from disadvantaged backgrounds may face particular difficulties in meeting these costs. Economic hardship can result in interrupted studies, delayed graduation, and reduced participation in extracurricular activities that enhance professional development.

6.3 Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence

Sexual harassment remains one of the most serious challenges confronting women in higher education. Studies have consistently identified harassment as a significant factor affecting academic performance, emotional well-being, and educational outcomes (Owolabi, 2022). Female students may encounter inappropriate advances, coercion, intimidation, and other forms of misconduct within educational environments. Such experiences create hostile learning conditions and undermine the principles of dignity and equality that educational institutions are expected to uphold.

Recent studies by the Women's Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC, 2025) found that female academics frequently encounter gender-based discrimination, workplace harassment, and exclusion from decision-making processes. The consequences of sexual harassment extend beyond individual victims. They contribute to reduced educational attainment, diminished confidence, psychological distress, and decreased institutional trust.

6.4 Underrepresentation in Academic Leadership

Although female enrolment in law faculties has increased significantly, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions within universities. Okagbue (2022) notes that female academics continue to encounter barriers in attaining professorial positions, deanships, directorships, and senior administrative roles. This phenomenon reflects broader patterns of gender inequality within higher education institutions. It must be noted that over time; there has been a significant shift from this phenomenon.

Leadership representation matters because institutional policies are often shaped by those occupying decision-making positions. The absence of women from leadership structures can limit institutional responsiveness to gender-related concerns. The lack of female leaders also affects mentorship opportunities and reduces the visibility of role models capable of inspiring younger generations.

6.5 Limited Access to Mentorship and Professional Networks

Mentorship plays a crucial role in academic and professional success. Effective mentors provide guidance concerning research, publication, career development, networking, and leadership opportunities. Historically, the legal profession has been dominated by men. Consequently, female students and young academics often face challenges in accessing mentorship relationships that address their specific experiences and concerns (International Bar Association, 2022).

6.6 Work-Life Balance and Caregiving Responsibilities

Women continue to bear a disproportionate share of caregiving responsibilities within many societies, including Nigeria. Academic careers require substantial commitments to teaching, research, publication, supervision, and administrative service. Balancing these responsibilities with family obligations can create significant pressures for female academics and students (Yusuf, 2023). Studies have shown that caregiving responsibilities often affect research productivity, conference participation, and opportunities for professional advancement. These challenges contribute to gender disparities in academic promotion and leadership representation.

6.7 Gender Bias in Curriculum and Institutional Culture

Another important barrier relates to curriculum content and institutional culture. Traditional legal curricula have historically reflected male perspectives and experiences, often neglecting gender-sensitive analyses of legal issues. Although progress has been made, feminist legal theory, gender justice, and women's rights issues remain underrepresented in many law programmes (Oba, 2021). Institutional cultures may also perpetuate subtle forms of exclusion through stereotypes, informal practices, and organizational norms that favour men.

6.8 The Digital Gender Divide

The increasing integration of technology into legal education has created both opportunities and challenges. Digital learning platforms offer flexibility and broader access to educational resources. However, unequal access to technology continues to affect many students. According to OECD (2023), women and girls in developing countries often experience lower levels of digital access than their male counterparts. Limited access to reliable internet services, computers, and digital tools can affect academic performance and participation. The digital divide became particularly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when educational institutions relied heavily on online learning platforms.

7. Empirical Trends in Gender and Legal Education in Nigeria

Empirical evidence suggests that women's participation in legal education has improved considerably over the past two decades. Many Nigerian universities now report substantial female representation within faculties of law. According to Ike (2023), female enrolment in several law faculties approaches or exceeds parity with male enrolment.

Similarly, women have become increasingly visible within the legal profession. More women are being called to the Nigerian Bar, establishing law firms, serving as judges, and occupying leadership positions within professional organizations. The judiciary provides an important illustration of this progress. Women have served as Justices of the Supreme Court, Presidents of the Court of Appeal, Chief Judges of various states, and heads of specialized courts (Bamgbose, 2020).

Recent appointments within legal education institutions also demonstrate changing attitudes toward gender and leadership. The appointment of Olugbemisola Odusote as the first female Director-General of the Nigerian Law School represents a significant milestone in institutional leadership (Africa Legal, 2026).

However, empirical evidence also indicates persistent disparities. Women remain underrepresented among senior advocates, law faculty professors, vice-chancellors, and principal officers of universities (Okagbue, 2022).

The coexistence of progress and inequality highlights the complexity of gender dynamics within legal education.

8. Breakthroughs and Emerging Opportunities

While significant challenges remain, important breakthroughs have transformed the landscape of legal education in Nigeria. These developments demonstrate the potential for continued progress and provide valuable lessons for future reforms.

8.1 Increased Female Participation in Legal Education

One of the most significant achievements in Nigerian legal education has been the steady increase in female enrolment across universities. While women were historically underrepresented in higher education, contemporary trends reveal substantial improvements in participation rates.

According to UNESCO (2024), efforts to expand educational access and reduce gender disparities have contributed significantly to increased female enrolment across tertiary institutions. In many Nigerian faculties of law, women now constitute a substantial proportion of the student population, reflecting changing societal attitudes toward women's education and professional development.

The increased presence of women in law faculties has important implications for diversity, inclusion, and representation. It expands the pool of female professionals entering the legal

profession and strengthens the prospects for gender-balanced leadership within legal institutions.

Furthermore, increased female enrolment challenges longstanding assumptions regarding women's suitability for legal careers and contributes to the normalization of women's participation in traditionally male-dominated professions.

8.2 Women in Legal Academia

The advancement of women within legal academia represents another significant breakthrough. Female academics have made important contributions to legal scholarship, teaching, curriculum development, and institutional leadership. Historically, legal academia in Nigeria was dominated by men. However, the achievements of pioneering scholars such as Professor Jadesola Akande demonstrated that women could excel in legal scholarship and attain positions of academic distinction. Her emergence as Nigeria's first female Professor of Law remains a landmark achievement in the history of legal education (Historical Nigeria, 2026).

Subsequent generations of female academics have continued to expand women's representation within universities. Women now serve as professors, deans, heads of departments, directors of academic programmes, and members of university governing bodies. Despite these gains, gender disparities remain evident. Research conducted by Okagbue (2022) indicates that women continue to be underrepresented at the highest levels of academic leadership. Nevertheless, the growing visibility of female scholars has created new opportunities for mentorship and institutional transformation.

8.3 Women in the Judiciary

The judiciary provides one of the most visible examples of female advancement within the legal profession. Nigerian women have achieved remarkable success in judicial service, serving at every level of the judicial hierarchy. Women have occupied positions as Magistrates, Judges of the High Court, Justices of the Court of Appeal, and Justices of the Supreme Court. Their contributions have shaped constitutional interpretation, human rights jurisprudence, electoral law, family law, and administrative justice (Bamgbose, 2020).

The appointment of women to senior judicial offices has significant symbolic and practical implications. Symbolically, it challenges traditional stereotypes regarding leadership and legal competence. Practically, it enhances diversity within judicial decision-making and contributes to broader public confidence in the justice system.

Studies suggest that gender diversity within judicial institutions promotes a wider range of perspectives and strengthens the legitimacy of legal institutions (UN Women, 2024). Female judicial officers also serve as role models for younger generations of law students and aspiring lawyers.

8.4 Women in Legal Practice

Women have similarly achieved notable success within private legal practice. Increasing numbers of female lawyers have established successful law firms, attained the prestigious rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), and assumed leadership positions within professional organizations. According to the International Bar Association (2022), female lawyers have demonstrated excellence across diverse areas of practice, including litigation, corporate law, arbitration, intellectual property law, taxation, energy law, and human rights advocacy.

The Nigerian Bar Association has also witnessed increasing female participation in leadership positions. These developments contribute to the gradual transformation of professional cultures and promote greater inclusiveness within the legal profession. The growing visibility of successful female lawyers provides important mentorship opportunities for young practitioners and challenges stereotypes concerning women's professional capabilities.

8.5 Clinical Legal Education and Gender Justice

Clinical legal education has emerged as an important mechanism for promoting social justice and gender equality. Clinical programmes enable students to apply legal knowledge to real-world problems while providing legal assistance to underserved communities.

According to Oba (2021), clinical legal education enhances practical skills, ethical awareness, and professional responsibility. It also exposes students to issues affecting vulnerable populations, including women, children, persons with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged groups. Many law clinics in Nigeria engage in activities relating to domestic violence, gender-based violence, inheritance rights, workplace discrimination, and access to justice. Through these initiatives, students develop practical advocacy skills while contributing to social transformation.

Clinical legal education therefore serves both educational and societal objectives by linking legal training with the promotion of human rights and gender justice.

8.6 Digital Transformation and Technological Innovation

Technological innovation has created new opportunities for advancing gender equality within legal education. Digital learning platforms, virtual libraries, online conferences, and electronic legal databases have expanded access to educational resources. The increasing availability of online learning opportunities has been particularly beneficial for women balancing educational pursuits with professional and family responsibilities. Flexible learning arrangements allow students and academics to participate in educational activities regardless of geographical location (OECD, 2023).

Digital technologies have also facilitated research collaboration, professional networking, and access to global academic communities. These developments can help reduce some of the barriers traditionally faced by women within higher education.

However, realizing the full benefits of digital transformation requires addressing persistent inequalities in access to technology and internet connectivity.

9. Critical Analysis

The Nigerian experience demonstrates both significant progress and continuing challenges. On one hand, women have achieved unprecedented levels of participation within legal education and the legal profession. Increased enrolment, leadership appointments, judicial representation, and professional achievements reflect important advances toward gender equality. On the other hand, substantial disparities remain. Formal equality has not always translated into substantive equality. Women continue to encounter obstacles arising from cultural expectations, economic constraints, workplace discrimination, and institutional practices.

The persistence of these barriers suggests that gender inequality cannot be understood solely as a legal issue. It is also a social, cultural, economic, and institutional phenomenon requiring multidimensional responses. Theoretical perspectives discussed earlier provide useful insights into this reality. Liberal feminism highlights the importance of legal and policy reforms, while radical feminism draws attention to deeper structural inequalities. Intersectionality further emphasizes the need to recognize diversity among women and address multiple forms of disadvantage simultaneously. Effective reform therefore requires a holistic approach that combines legal protections with institutional transformation and cultural change.

10. Recommendations

To strengthen gender equality within legal education in Nigeria, several measures are recommended.

10.1 Strengthening Institutional Policies

Universities and legal education institutions should adopt comprehensive gender equality policies addressing discrimination, harassment, and exclusion. Such policies should clearly define prohibited conduct and establish mechanisms for enforcement.

10.2 Establishing Effective Reporting Mechanisms

Educational institutions should create confidential, accessible, and effective reporting systems for addressing sexual harassment and gender-based misconduct. Victims should be protected from retaliation and provided with appropriate support services.

10.3 Expanding Scholarship Opportunities

Government agencies, universities, development partners, and private organizations should increase scholarship opportunities targeting female law students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

10.4 Promoting Mentorship Programmes

Structured mentorship programmes should connect female students and young academics with experienced legal professionals. Mentorship can enhance confidence, professional development, and career advancement.

10.5 Enhancing Women's Leadership Representation

Universities and professional organizations should adopt measures aimed at increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making positions. Leadership development initiatives can help prepare women for senior roles.

10.6 Mainstreaming Gender into Legal Curriculum

Law faculties should integrate gender perspectives across substantive and procedural law courses. Greater attention should be devoted to feminist legal theory, gender justice, and women's rights.

10.7 Supporting Research and Data Collection

Reliable data are essential for evidence-based policymaking. Institutions should collect and publish gender-disaggregated data relating to admissions, academic performance, promotion, leadership representation, and professional outcomes.

10.8 Addressing the Digital Divide

Efforts should be made to improve access to digital technologies, internet connectivity, and technological training. Such measures are necessary to ensure equitable participation in contemporary legal education.

10.9 Strengthening Professional Networks

Professional associations should continue to support initiatives promoting women's participation and advancement within legal practice and academia.

10.10 Encouraging Cultural Transformation

Long-term progress requires addressing cultural attitudes and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality. Educational institutions, civil society organizations, religious bodies, and community leaders all have important roles to play in promoting gender-inclusive values.

11. Conclusion

Gender and legal education are closely interconnected. The Nigerian experience reveals a remarkable journey from exclusion to increasing participation. Women have achieved significant progress in accessing legal education, entering the legal profession, attaining judicial appointments, and assuming leadership positions within academia and professional

organizations. These achievements demonstrate the transformative impact of educational expansion, legal reforms, advocacy efforts, and changing social attitudes.

Nevertheless, substantial challenges remain. Patriarchal norms, economic inequalities, sexual harassment, leadership disparities, mentorship deficits, and technological barriers continue to affect women's experiences within educational and professional institutions. These challenges illustrate the distinction between formal equality and substantive equality.

Drawing upon liberal feminism, radical feminism, and intersectionality, this article has argued that achieving genuine gender equality requires more than legal guarantees. It requires institutional accountability, inclusive policies, cultural transformation, and sustained commitment to reform.

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