

## Assessing Obafemi Awolowo University's gender equity policy: Nigeria's under-representation of women persists

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This paper assesses the impact of the Obafemi Awolowo University gender equity policy on enrolment, employment and decision making. Quantitatively, secondary data were obtained from the Planning, Monitoring and Budgeting Unit (PMBU) of the University, while qualitatively, an in-depth interview method was employed to elicit information from the key stakeholders in the University, namely students, teaching and non-teaching staff, different union members, Provosts of Colleges, Deans of Faculties, and past and present Directors and Heads of Departments. Data were analysed in themes. Results showed slight increases in female undergraduate enrolment, female academic employment and in decision making, but decreases in female postgraduate enrolment, compared with 2009 data. This implies that the policy has not met the specific objective of achieving 60:40 male:female ratios in undergraduate and postgraduate student enrolment, female academic staff employment and decision making by 2010. This result was attributed to the non-implementation of gender policy in the University. The major constraints identified for the non-implementation of the policy were funding, patriarchal beliefs, and practices which do not encourage women to compete with their male counterparts in top administrative positions. The paper concludes that the gender equity policy in Obafemi Awolowo University has not made the expected impact as stipulated in the policy, due to patriarchal tendencies - the "hidden curriculum".

### Introduction

When we read about *hidden transcripts* in Morley (2006) and the *hidden curriculum* in Mejiuni (2013), it was not at first fully understood how deep and important these concepts were, and how serious the problem could be. However, when we recently gave a serious thought to the *Gender Policy* which was designed in 2009 in Obafemi Awolowo University (2009), we began to ask ourselves whether the Obafemi Awolowo University gender equity policy has become a victim of the *hidden curriculum*.

The Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) was established in 1962 with teaching, learning and culture as its broad objectives. At the commencement of the University, men were the major workforce of the University, particularly at the teaching level. In order to retain and stabilise the male staff members, their wives were recruited as administrative staff, mainly at the junior cadre (Afonja, Soetan, Amole & Odeyemi, 2002). However, like most Nigerian universities, the Obafemi Awolowo University imbibed patriarchal tendencies that imagine, subordinate and treat women as second class citizens. In other words, gender disparities exist at all levels where women are not supposed to participate on equal terms with men. It is within this context that women's absence, especially in leadership and other top administrative positions in the University, is located (Eboiyehi, Fayomi & Eboiyehi, 2016). The near absence of women in higher education in Africa and Nigeria in particular was observed by Odejide, Akanji and Odekunle (2006). They noted that while

gender is not explicitly on the university agenda, university life is a highly gendered experience. Acker (1992) reached similar conclusions that the divide between reproduction and production constitute the gendered under-structure of societies' institutions. This corresponds with what Connell (1987, 2005) referred to as "hegemonic masculinity" which pervades many institutional areas including academia.

Interestingly, towards the close of 1990s gender equity became part of Obafemi Awolowo University's strategic plans. To this end, the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies was established as part of the University's Strategic Plan to reduce gender gaps in students' enrolment, staff employment and decision making processes in 1996 (Afonja et al., 2002). Thus, the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies represents a veritable tool in building a congenial learning environment where the talents of men and women are equitably harnessed (Ogbogu, 2013; Abiose, 2008).

A situation analysis study which investigated gender issues at OAU in 2002 showed that female enrolment had never exceeded 30% of total enrolment (Obafemi Awolowo University, 2009). According to the Situational Analysis Report, of the total enrolment of 18,389 in 1999/2000, only 27.3% were females." During the 2001/2002 academic year, female enrolment decreased from 27.3% to 24.2% (i.e. out of a total enrolment of 6,980 students, only 24.2% were females). Data on employment at the University also showed gender disparity, with few women compared to men were employed up till 1970s. Data for the 2001/2002 academic session showed that females constituted close to "19% of the university staff, the majority of these (62.7%) being administrative and technical staff. Females accounted for only 13.6% of the total academic staff strength" (Obafemi Awolowo University, 2009).

Furthermore, the situation analysis report on gender issues in the University revealed that female participation in decision-making was very limited. Of the 19 statutory committees, male representation was approximately "10 times that of females on 6 committees, and 5 times on 5 committees" (Obafemi Awolowo University, 2009). According to the Policy, the gender gap is widest in Senate where the ratio was 19 males to 1 female. As at 2002, of the 206 professors at OAU, only 9 (4.3%) were females. Years 2002 to 2009 recorded no female dean of faculty and only one vice dean was a female. Of the 68 heads of academic departments, only 12 (15.0%) were females, the majority as acting heads (Obafemi Awolowo University, 2009).

For looking at these historical disparities in enrolment, employment and senior decision making positions, the University policy is positioned on the principles of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 26 Paragraph 1, which specifies that "Everyone has the right to education ... and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" (United Nations, 1948). The different Human Rights Conventions have affirmed that educational systems should be made gender sensitive to ensure full participation of women in educational administration, policy and decision making (Obafemi Awolowo University, 2009). The broad aim of the OAU gender policy is to promote gender equity within the university in order to enhance organisational effectiveness, fundamental human rights and equity. The specific objectives of the policy are to reduce the gender gap in

both undergraduate and postgraduate student enrolment and achieve a 60:40 ratio (male:female) in science based disciplines by 2010 (p.7); reduce gender gaps in employment at all levels in the university, ensure a 70:30 ratio (male:female) in the employment of academic staff (p.7); and encourage women to participate fully in decision making in the university, achieving 70:30 ratio (male:female) in committees and leadership positions in the University, (p.11) (Obafemi Awolowo University, 2009).

However, since the approval of the policy in 2009, not much has been heard about it. Most of the stakeholders who are supposed to push for its implementation seem not to be interested. This study therefore is an attempt to investigate whether the objectives of the policy are being met.

## Theoretical underpinning

The paper adopts feminism as a theoretical framework for the study. The feminist orientation is a theoretical position as well as action/advocacy against the subordination of women. Although there are numerous strands of feminism ranging from Marxist feminism, liberal, radical, socialist to black and postmodernist feminisms, they all agree on one thing: that women are subjugated and marginalised and that this should be changed in order to enable women enjoy full citizenship rights. Mama (2011) defined feminism as the ongoing struggle to free women from centuries of oppression, exploitation and marginalisation in all the vast majority of known human societies. It is a call to end patriarchy and to expose, deconstruct and eradicate all the personal, social, economic and political practices, habits and assumptions that sustain gender inequality and injustice around the world. Feminism seeks nothing less than the transformation of our institutions. It represents the realisation that women are dominated and marginalized, that something is amiss about the way women are treated, something that is there but difficult to pinpoint. No wonder Friedan (1963) described feminism as a problem without a name. This is because it is as pervasive and embedded in every facet of life as a normal way of life.

Historically, women were denied access to higher education. Due to their historical disadvantage, it took time before they were admitted into higher education. In Africa, Kwesiga (2002) reported of the long trek which Ugandan women had to make before they had access into higher education. The same applies to women in Nigeria and other African countries. It is not astonishing that in leadership, male university leaders are preferred because it is believed that they can easily handle students' unrest (Odejide et al., 2006). The price women therefore needed to pay to be successful in top jobs in higher education was to conform strictly to the accepted male norms of what a leader looked like and how they should behave (Burkinshaw & White, 2017).

This problem without a name was also described by Morley (2006) as the *hidden transcript*. Morley's (2006) hidden transcript was about the subtle and complex ways in which discrimination against women takes place in higher education. In daily interactions among members of Obafemi Awolowo University community, the patriarchal gender relations

between men and women play out in such a way that women are edged out of senior academic and leadership positions (Eboiyehi, Fayomi & Eboiyehi, 2016). As noted by Morley (2006), the micro politics that permeates the experiences of women in higher education is carried out through informal networks, coalitions, and exclusions, as well as by formal arrangements in classrooms and boardrooms. Much of this network formation occurs in the University staff club which male staff attend on a daily basis after work, while the female staff retire to their houses to prepare meals and attend to their children. More significantly, many important decisions including selection of committees and board members are taken at this forum to the exclusion of women. As such, networks, coalitions, formal arrangements in classrooms and boardrooms work in synergy to exclude women from every facet of the university life. This issue of the classroom shows that this problem starts from the root and this could explain the importance of Mejiuni's (2013) hidden curriculum in this analysis.

Mejiuni (2013) observed that the teaching-learning process in higher education, and religion, taught and learned through non-formal and informal education constitutes the hidden curriculum and that these work together with other socialisation processes within and outside the formal school system to determine the persons that women become. This is an indication that women's inability or reluctance to put themselves forward for leadership positions is a result of the teaching they have received, starting from birth. This goes to show that even when women are highly educated, part of their education tends to disempower them because this education is political (Mejiuni, 2013). In further discussions about barriers to women's leadership in Universities, Morley and Crossouard (2015) found that several factors constituted barriers to women attaining leadership in the South Asian context. They pointed at the socio-cultural factors - that societies have potent messages about what is considered gender appropriate behaviour - for instance, that women should not be in authority over men. They also pointed at absence of structured intervention to develop women's leadership and academic culture, women's perception of leadership, and gender biased recruitment and selection. Consequently, these have been found to have increasingly affected their career paths (Bagilhole & White, 2013; O'Connor, 2014; Burkinshaw & White, 2017)

The exclusion of women in African universities had been noted by feminist scholars (Odejide et al., 2006; Acker, 2012; Kwesiga, 2002; Morley, 2010; Afonja 2002). In fact, Afonja (2002) in her gender situational analysis in Obafemi Awolowo University found a large gender gap between men and women in enrolment, employment and decision making in the university. Aiston and Yang (2017) argued that the under-representation of women in academic leadership is a global phenomenon. They found that even in the United Kingdom, for instance, men still dominate the top leadership roles, chairing 81% of all governing bodies and holding 78% of vice-chancellor or principal roles. They also found that, as developed as the UK is, only 24% of professors in the UK are female. Dunn, Gerlach and Hyle (2014) argued that male-centric leadership models and norms have served to limit women's aspirations regarding leadership, as well as their access to leadership roles. They stressed further that the under-representation of women in academic administration suggested that masculine practices and leadership norms function to exclude women.

This brought about advocacy for gender mainstreaming in the University. It culminated into a gender equity project that brought about a gender policy for the OAU which was approved by the University council in 2009. In fact, in their study carried out in three selected universities in southwestern Nigeria including the Obafemi Awolowo University, Eboiyehi et al. (2016) found that 66.7% of principal officers in Obafemi Awolowo University were males compared to 33.3% females. Furthermore, the study also found that since its inception, the positions of Vice-Chancellor and Provost of Colleges have been occupied by men. It was only in middle level management positions such as finance officer, personnel officer, faculty officer were women found (Eboiyehi et al, 2016). This important submission by Eboiyehi et al. (2016) is "an indication of poor representation of women in this important area of University life". They concluded that "the significant thing here is that Obafemi Awolowo University that prides itself of having a gender policy is not faring any better".

Bunwaree (2010) argued that feminism is a movement and advocacy as well as a theoretical orientation seeking to change the situation of women. It could be argued that this policy has not yielded much of the expected change, due to the hidden transcripts and hidden curriculums in the university system. The problem has been so rooted in the fabric of the University and society that it could explain the reason for the gender policy not making much impact. In this respect, Morley (2006) held the view that even where there is a sophisticated equity policy context, macro aspirations often do not reach the micro-level of experience. Indeed, Morley's assertion captured the situation of gender policy in Obafemi Awolowo University because the equality aspirations of the proposers of gender equity have not seen the light of the day, owing to invisible, subtle resistances. The hidden curriculum is unwritten, but is even more powerful than the written rules and policies because they guide the behaviour of the university members more than any rules and policies. Yet the university is being run on the premise of neutrality. Because of the supposed neutral nature of the University and the unwritten nature of the hidden curriculum, it is difficult to hold in concrete terms and as such very hard to fight or tackle. It is also very difficult to take on anybody based on this, because it is invisible, yet very hegemonic due to its embeddedness in patriarchal gender relations. The sly nature of patriarchy has made it seem natural that much of the time, it is women that rise against fellow women who dare to be different.

The gender policy at Obafemi Awolowo University has shown that it is not enough to transform the University into a gender sensitive and gender compliant university organisation. Indeed Mama (2011a) captured the situation when she noted that:

Today this struggle is still on but feminists are now concerned to push beyond the already normative policy rhetoric on gender equity, demanding the translation of expressed vision and mission statements into practical changes in the gendered configuration of academic institutions. (p.3)

These practical changes have eluded women in higher education. As indicated by Mama (2011a), through gender and women studies, feminist scholars have also tackled gendered teaching and research practices that persist in scholarship and pedagogy. Gender

hierarchies continue to hamper women's full and equal participation in the intellectual life of the continent. These obstacles were noted by Periera (2002), stating that gender studies exist in a parallel universe while the mainstream scholarship continues to exhibit androcentrism and an unwillingness to engage with gender. This unwillingness to engage with gender has played out in the implementation of gender policy in Obafemi Awolowo University and has made the policy in Mama's words (2011a; 2011b) a mere "policy rhetoric". Relying on these frameworks, we argue that the inability of gender policy to make significant transformation is due to the hidden curriculum that operates in daily interactions and relationships in the University. This argument also becomes the main hypothesis of this study. Moreover, the practical steps to be taken to bring about a real transformation and move gender policy from rhetoric to real transformational document is also the interest of this paper.

## Method

Fieldwork for this study was first carried out during November 2016 to February 2017, when we were collecting preliminary data for the assessment of gender policy at Obafemi Awolowo University. The second round of interviews for this research was conducted from May-June 2018, following suggestions from reviewers to involve all the stakeholders in the University community.

Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) was established on 5 October 1962, along with two other universities (University of Lagos and University of Nigeria, Nsukka). Thus OAU is one of Nigeria's second-generation or "frontline" universities. It is located in Ile-Ife, Osun State, in southwest Nigeria about 200 km north of Lagos, the former capital of Nigeria. In 2009 the University attained a student enrolment of over 25,000 and staff numbering 5,277 (Obafemi Awolowo University, 2009). Presently, the OAU has 13 Faculties, 95 Departments, 8 Research Institutes/Units and 5 Academic Centres, plus the College of Health Sciences and Postgraduate College which offer masters and doctorate degrees. Postgraduates comprised about 17.3% of the total student population in 2009, and about 11.4% in 2017 (Table 1).

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. Primary data were sourced through questionnaire administration and in-depth interviews, while the secondary data were obtained from OAU's Planning, Monitoring and Budgeting Unit (PMBU). The combination of quantitative data from PMBU and qualitative data from interviews enabled the researchers to dig deep into the intricacies of the micro-politics of the university which made it difficult for the gender policy to achieve a significant transformation of the University. Altogether, 28 in-depth interviews were conducted with four Principal Officers (3 males and 1 female); two Provosts (male only); six Deans and HoDs (5 males and 1 female), four Directors of Centres (2 males and 2 females), four non academic staff (2 males and 2 females) and eight students. Some of these participants have been working in the University for up to thirty years or more and have risen through the ranks over the years. The officers, (i.e. Principal officers, Provosts, Deans/HoDs Directors of Centres, Heads of Departments, Deans and Directors) were selected and interviewed due to their experiences in university management. The selection was based

on the premise that they know so much about the gender policy and are in a vantage position to give information concerning its implementation and problems associated with its non implementation. Also, they were interviewed to further understand the impact of gender policy (if any) with respect to student enrolment, staff employment and women participation in decision making in the university. Furthermore, eight postgraduate students (2 male and 2 female postgraduates; 2 male and 2 female undergraduates) were interviewed to ascertain whether they were aware of the existence of a gender policy in the university. The specific research questions were:

1. Are there differences in gender situation in enrolment, employment and decision making in the University between 2009 and 2017?
2. How was policy received by the stakeholders?
3. Has the policy been implemented? If no, what are the constraints to its implementation?
4. What are practical steps to be taken to bring about a real transformation in the university?

In carrying out the research, the problem of the ethics of researching one's institution was removed by employing two independent researchers from another institution to help with the interviews which were audio recorded to ensure that all important information was captured. While the quantitative data were analysed using simple frequencies and percentages, the qualitative data were analysed in themes, with each objective forming a theme. Interviewees were given an opportunity to read the transcripts and become reassured that their views were appropriately represented

## **Results**

Table 1 shows male and female representation in student enrolment, staff employment and decision making in the university (in percentages) in 2009 and 2017. This is to ascertain if there are any improvements in student enrolment, staff employment and in decision making process since the approval of the OAU gender equity policy in 2009.

The results show that compared to 2009, there was an improvement in female student enrolment at the undergraduate level from 34.3% to 45.6% in 2017, and a decrease in female postgraduate enrolment from 39.2% in 2009 to 37.8% in 2017. This implies that the policy has failed to meet the specific objective of reducing gender gaps in postgraduate student enrolment and achieve a 60:40 ratio (male:female) by 2010. Despite the encouragement of female undergraduates (through Carnegie Scholarships) to pursue higher degree programs in their respective fields and continue in academia, there was only a slight increase in the employment of female academic staff, from 23.5% in 2009 to 25.8% in 2017. The same applies to senior administrative staff employed within the period covered by the study, as the percentage of female administrative staff increased from 35.7% in 2009 to 39.9% in 2017. However, these slight increases were not enough to meet the objective of the policy as the above results clearly show that gender disparities in the enrolment of students and staff employment still exist as it did in 2009.

Table 1: Representation in student enrolment, staff employment and decision making in OAU by gender, 2009 and 2017

Particulars	2009		2017	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Undergraduate student enrolment	16,889 (65.7%)	8,820 (34.3%)	14,043 (54.4%)	11,791 (45.6%)
Postgraduate student enrolment	3,263 (60.8%)	2,103 (39.2%)	2,061 (62.2%)	1,255 (37.8%)
Academic staff employment	991 (76.5%)	304 (23.5%)	1,038 (74.2%)	361 (25.8%)
Deans (14)	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)
Provosts (PG College and Health Sciences)	2 (100%)	-	2 (100%)	-
Senior administrative staff	998 (64.3%)	554 (35.7%)	1,007 (60.1%)	669 (39.9%)
Junior staff	1,137 (85%)	201 (15%)	603 (66.5%)	304 (33.5%)
Bursar	-	1 (100.0%)	-	1 (100.0%)
Registrar	Male (100%)	-	Male (100%)	-
Librarian	Male (100%)	-	-	Female (100%)
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Administration	Male (100%)	-	Male (100%)	-
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic	Female (100%)	-	Male (100%)	-
Vice-Chancellor	Male (100%)	-	Male (100%)	-
Pro-Chancellor	Male (100%)	-	Male (100%)	-

Source: OAU Planning, Monitoring and Budgeting Unit (PMBU), 2018.

Regarding decision making processes in the University, there has not been any significant change in women's participation. Except for the office of Bursar, the offices of Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (administration); Provosts of Colleges, Deans and Registrar are still being occupied by men. This is an indication that the "glass ceiling" is still playing out for women and leadership in the University. This finding is in accord with Eboiyehi et al. (2016) who recorded that the proportion of females in top administrative positions in Obafemi Awolowo University was dismally low compared to their male counterparts. Also, only a very few women are members of the highest decision making bodies such as the University Senate and Council. These results are indications that the gender policy has also not brought about the significant transformation needed in the University in the area of decision making. To complement these results, in-depth interviews were conducted with the stakeholders including management staff, provosts, deans, heads of departments (HoDs), academic and non academic staff, and students, to ascertain why the policy has not met both its broad and specific objectives.

## Results from interviews

During the in-depth interviews, there were divergent views from different stakeholders. While some of the interviewees welcomed the idea of having a university gender policy,



others were not receptive. For some HoDs, the idea of having a gender policy was a welcome development as they saw it as a kind of constitution that would guide the conduct of staff and students as they relate to one another or to gender issues in the University. But for some others, it was a duplication of rules and regulations already guiding the affairs of the University and therefore there was no need for it. Yet for some others, it was a Western idea being propagated by feminist scholars in the University and therefore saw it as alien to African culture. According to one female professor interviewed:

Looking at this prevailing conditions, one would therefore expect stiff resistance from this group of scholars when the policy was formulated. It is therefore not surprising that for several years now, we have not been hearing about OAU Gender Policy. Initially, we were all eager to see it implemented. I mean by now, the policy ought to have been fully implemented. The Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies which played a major role in the formulation of the policy ought to have followed and pushed for its implementation. I hope it will not end up in the shelves like other important university documents.

The above implies that the impact of the Gender Policy is not being felt in the University as expected. According to a former Dean and HOD in Faculty of Social Sciences:

My fear is that all the struggles to have a Gender Policy for the University may not yield any result at the end of the day. The policy may not make any impact.

In the same vein, a 60 year old former Director of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies who was also instrumental in the drafting of the policy stated thus:

When the issue of drafting a Gender Policy for OAU was first raised at our committee meeting, the idea was received with enthusiasm. However, we were not sure how others would receive it because buying into such idea would be based on personal conviction. So, our fear was that while some would welcome it as a vital document; some may be indifferent and others may be amused.

She stressed further:

This is because in a patriarchal society like ours, no one would expect all university stakeholders to welcome the gender policy with open arms. Thus, despite their high level of education and sensitisations, many stakeholders in the university still hold tenaciously to their traditional views about women as subordinate human beings.

A senior member of the non academic staff union also buttressed this by saying:

There are many people within the system with negative perception about the policy. Certainly, one would expect this group of people to be cold towards the implementation of the policy. They would rather argue that the status quo be maintained.

One of the former Directors of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies actually captured the picture when she stated:

Many university administrators may not be interested in the policy. One will be surprised that some of them may even be annoyed whenever the issues of gender equity and gender policy are being discussed. Majority of them see gender equity propagators as overbearing women who are trying to overturn the African culture. This could also explain the long struggle the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies had to engage before securing the approval from the University Council.

The question that readily comes to mind therefore is, has gender policy achieved its objectives of improving student enrolment, staff employment and women in decision making? To be able to answer these questions, participants were interviewed to ascertain the extent to which these objectives have been achieved.

### **Student enrolment: Interviewees' views**

Various stakeholders were asked whether the policy has achieved its objectives of 60:40 male/female ratios in enrolment. One of the former Directors now aged 60 years said:

Yes, in enrolment, particularly for undergraduates, this has been achieved. The policy has succeeded in bridging the gaps between male and female enrolment in the University. This feat has been achieved through Carnegie Scholarships Scheme for female students in the University. The policy has not been able to achieve this for the female postgraduate students for so many reasons: some may not like to come back after getting jobs, while others get married and settle down to start having children. However, if you ask me again, I will say it is a success story compared to when we started.

This finding is in accord with results from the quantitative analysis of the study where it was found that undergraduate female enrolment increased from 34.3% in 2009 to 45.6% in 2017 while that of female postgraduate decreased from 39.2% to 37.8% in 2017. Results from female postgraduate enrolment have shown that the policy has not achieved its expected objectives of 60:40 male/female ratios in postgraduate enrolment in the University. If the gender gaps are closing in undergraduate enrolment, it could be that girls are becoming more confident from their secondary schools trainings. This is because there has not been any affirmative action or discretion in the admission process. As such, there was no conscious effort to bring in girls to increase their representation in the University.

Correspondingly, a male interviewees in the Admissions Office aged 55 affirmed:

If there is increase in enrolment, it is not due to the presence of the policy because the policy has not enforced the affirmative action on discretionary admission of females in the university.

Also a female postgraduate student had this to say:

I was not given admission into the university because I am a female, neither was I admitted because there was a policy in place which says I must be admitted because I am a woman. In fact, I have not heard about that policy. I was admitted for my postgraduate studies because I met the criteria for admission. I am the only female in my class. If there is gender policy to that effect, female students would have been many in my class. If you

ask me again, I would say the gender policy did not play any role in my postgraduate admission, I merited it.

### **Staff employment**

Data from in-depth interview on employment also corroborate the quantitative data. According to a male HoD aged 63 years:

Well, I can say in this regard, things have really not changed. Compared to their male counterparts, women are still very few in academia except at the junior cadre though there has been a slight increase of women in academia. This is a sign that more women are coming into academia gradually. We need more of them. However, this is happening on its own because there has not been any conscious effort to bring in women into academia in the University. Instead, women applicants go through more stringent interview process before they are hired. This is in spite of the fact that gender has become a key development concept.

A senior female Administrative Officer stated:

No matter what you are told, women are still grossly under-employed in the University except at the junior cadres. In other words, men are still employed in higher positions. Nobody can come out to say s/he has felt the impact of the policy in this regard.

### **Decision making**

In decision making, there is no sign that the situation of women has changed. The study found that in decision making, female participation and representation goes back and forth without showing any improvement. If there was any shift in enrolment and employment, such change was not so visible in the decision making processes of the University. A former female Director of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies said:

I remember granting you an interview about a year or two years ago. I still stand by that interview. The total number of women in decision making bodies in the University is still far from expectation. Therefore, when we compare the number of women in the Senate or Council, you will discover that that we are still not there yet. The patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society and OAU community in particular still does not allow women in the decision making processes. This may not happen except we continue to fight for our rights. That was the whole essence of the Gender Policy which to me, is being swept under the carpet. Though approved by the University, nobody is feeling the impact of the policy.

Supporting this line of argument, a former female HoD in the Faculty of Technology stated:

As it was in 2009 so it is in 2017. Go and check, the majority of the Deans, HoDs and Directors are men. The Provosts of Postgraduate College and College of Health Science are men. Except for the positions of Librarian and Bursar, all the Principal Officers are men. Senate is also dominated by men and Council too. I think what we need in this

University is the implementation of the Gender Policy. But the question is, will the men allow it to be implemented? They are not ready to relinquish power hence; they continue to hold unto it tenaciously.

According to a former Director of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies:

Many women are also not helping matters as they shy away from contesting for top positions in the University. Despite all the sensitisation workshops and leadership training programs they received from the Centre, most of them still see decision making as the domain of men.

The optimism of the former Director was almost infectious but the fact still remains that women's participation in leadership positions has not improved in any way in the University. In spite of the efforts by the Centre, women top management leaders are nowhere to be found. The question is where are all the women who benefited from leadership training programs of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies which gulped a lot of funds? It is likely that most of these women abandoned what they learnt from this training at the airports on return to Nigeria. Could this be responsible for the non implementation of the policy in the University? To this question we now turn.

### **On the implementation of the gender policy in the University**

The study found that implementation of the policy was a major obstacle confronting the Gender Policy in OAU. According to the 60 years old former Director of Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies:

One can state categorically that the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies of this University has done well compared to other universities. However, that does not mean that the policy has performed well in terms of implementation. The Centre has carried out a lot of sensitisation on gender equity issues, but we guess that much of such training and awareness creation fell on deaf ears. This is not surprising since in the University, there are still many people with patriarchal tendencies and negative attitudes towards gender equity issues. This group of people may be working in the opposite direction i.e. against the implementation of the policy. This may be part of the problems that are working against the policy.

A 38 year old PhD student who was a beneficiary of Carnegie Scholarship during her undergraduate and MSc programs in the University stated:

I am surprised that nobody is talking about the policy any longer. During my undergraduate days, we used to attend sensitisation programs and motivational workshops that were being organised by the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies for different stakeholders in the University then. I thought by now the policy would have been a reference point by members of the University community. For me, it is not clear whether the policy has been implemented because the impact is not being felt. I have not seen anybody talking about its enforcement at any forum. In my set, I am the only female postgraduate student out of 20 students. When you ask why it still remains so, all you will be told is that the University admits students based on merit.

Similar comments were made by a 58 years old female professor and former Head of Department in the Faculty of Science. She remarked:

Nobody is thinking of implementing the policy. People are only paying lip service and say what they felt the Gender Equity propagators would like to hear and it ends there. Nobody is feeling the impact of the policy.

These responses were indications that nobody is thinking of implementing the gender policy in the University. Sadly, the excitement that greeted the formulation of the policy ended the moment it was approved by the University in 2009. Ever since there has not been any mention of the policy except anytime that the University wants to impress visitors so as to show that the university is gender sensitive.

Correspondingly, 62 years old female senior administrative staff (non academic) stated as follows:

To the best of my knowledge, we have not implemented it in my Unit because we have not been told that the University has approved of its implementation. That is not to say that we are not using our discretion to deal with issues relating to the policy. The University should implement it and let us know about it.

This interviewee has brought another dimension to the issue. Her response showed that the approval of the gender policy was not widely circulated. There was no full awareness creation about the gender policy and this is a pointer to the fact that the University has not given the gender Policy the publicity and consideration it deserves.

However, one of the former Directors of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies affirmed:

When I was the Director, the Centre had organised several retreats for Deans and HoDs to educate them on gender issues in order to facilitate the implementation of the policy. I want to say that we have done well in this area. All the stakeholders in the University community namely; students, academic staff, non academic staff, students' union, Academic Staff Union of the University (ASUU) and their counterparts (the non Academic Staff Union) were all sensitised on gender issues with regard to driving gender equity in the university.

### **On whether the policy has achieved its objective of having gender in the curriculum or as a special elective**

In order to mainstream gender into the University curriculum the policy proposed "gender studies" as one of the special elective courses. Special electives are courses every student is expected to take and have knowledge about. When asked whether this has been achieved, a former Director of Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies said:

Very soon, a gender elective course will be mounted in the University for students to acquire more knowledge about gender issues so as to move towards social change as people gain knowledge about gender equality.

On how soon this will become a reality, she stated further:

To be frank, I don't know. Since that proposal, I have not seen or heard anything in that regard but I know something is being done on it. In summary, I would like to say that for now, there is no special elective course in Gender Studies in the university. This could be due to the difficulty in pushing anything on gender equity in the University.

Also, one of the female professors and a member of the University Senate argued:

Getting any curriculum through is not an easy task because it has to pass through many committees and these committees are made up of mainly men and a few women who may not share the passion of the Gender Equity Project.

Another male professor stated:

If the Centre succeeds in instituting Gender as Special Elective, many male students may not want to offer the course. If that happens, the aim will be defeated. I would suggest that changing the general curriculum to reflect gender inputs will be a better option.

An interview with a male undergraduate law student shows that the above argument may not be true after all. According to him:

If there is any special elective like that I will be interested to take it. I also believe my course mates and colleagues in other faculties will also be interested in it. I strongly believe that the course will be of interest particularly to those of us that have interest in human rights issues

### **Constraints to the implementation of the policy**

The interviewees were asked to identify the major constraints that may be working against the implementation of the policy. An academic staff at the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies had this to say:

The major constraint to the implementation is funds. Without funds, the implementation of the policy will be difficult and almost impossible.

While agreeing with the above interviewee that funding is pivotal in the implementation of the policy, it was not clear whether the University considers the Gender Policy serious enough to make funds available for its implementation. This is especially so, when one considers the fact that the original funding for the development of the policy came from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

A former Director of the Centre stated thus:

To me, the major constraint is our culture which tends to stifle any program aimed at gender equity in the University. This is done by not giving/allocating any fund for Gender Equity Programmes thereby allowing the programme to die a natural death.

She stated further:

Do not forget that this is a gender issue. Don't also forget that we are living in a patriarchal society. Our male counterparts may not be feeling comfortable with the policy. They are ready at any available opportunity to fight against it. It is always difficult for men to relinquish power and accept change. They don't want anybody to change this status quo. Funding the policy is another major constraint. The Centre does not have the wherewithal to implement the policy on its own. It needs financial support from the University or Federal Government to be able to achieve this. The Carnegie Corporation which supported the policy ... terminated [its support in] 2009.

The above results indicate that the major constraints to implementation of the policy are funding and the University's inclination towards patriarchal tendencies which is so embedded in the entire University life. It may be this patriarchal tendency that brought about the non implementation of the policy.

### **What should be done to bring about the implementation of the policy in the University?**

The interviewees were further asked to suggest the practical steps they feel needed to be taken in order to bring about the successful implementation of the Gender Policy. A former Director of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies suggested:

First of all, funds should be made available for its implementation. Also, there is need to strengthen gender focal points in various Faculties. The policy itself needs be revised because of the changes that might have taken place since it was drafted. Lastly, monitoring and evaluation which is key to making the policy effective should be revisited.

To buttress the above point, a postgraduate female student suggested:

The Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies should seek for more funds from within and outside the country to enable them implement the policy. They should also know how to lobby for fund allocation for its implementation. There is need for more gender sensitisation of all stakeholders in the university. In this respect, sensitisation and awareness creation programmes/ motivational workshops should be specifically organised regularly for senior university management and in fact for everybody. Female academic and non academic staff should be encouraged to partake in these workshops. Affirmative action should be religiously pursued and adopted by the university. In other words, interventions in the form of making laws that would lay down the minimum percentage of women in enrolment, employment and decision making in the University, as prescribed during the Beijing Platform for Action, should be enthusiastically pursued.

Also, a 58 year old professor and current Head of Department recommended as follows:

There is need to sensitise men about gender equality or equity. If men are not carried along, implementation of the policy will be a mirage. Men should also know that the world in which they live is changing and they must move with time. The Centre for

Gender and Social Policy Studies should intensify more efforts to ensure that what it fought so hard for is implemented. To do this, it should put the management on its toes.

## Discussion

The paper appraised the Obafemi Awolowo University Gender Policy and examined whether the objectives of the policy to reduce gender gap in undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolment have been achieved; and in employment by ensuring a 60:40 male/female ratio; and encouraging participation of women in decision making by achieving 60:40 male/female participation.

In order to achieve this objective, we examined the implementation of the policy and compared the gender components in the different facets of the University life between 2009 and 2017. The paper examined these various aspects by using the specific objectives as themes. Comparing the 2009 and 2017 data showed that there were slight improvements in the percentage of females in academia and in student enrolment (Table 1). However, results from in-depth interviews indicated that this improvement was not as a result of implementation of gender policy because there has not been any gender discretion in admission of students or in decision making positions. This is an indication that Gender Policy has not achieved its set objectives. The failure of the University to implement the policy was found to be due mainly to internal politics and patriarchal tendencies. This finding accords with Morley (2006) who concluded that higher education institutions are governed by micro-politics which is carried out through informal networks, coalitions, and exclusions that permeate the experiences of women in higher education.

It is within this hidden transcript that the ineffectiveness of the Obafemi Awolowo Gender Policy is located. We therefore argue that the University is highly patriarchal, where men dominate in virtually all spheres. It is therefore not surprising that the development agenda and changes in African higher institutions preach reform but do not transform (Mama, 2003). This may be exactly what has happened in the approval without implementation of Gender Policy in the University. It may therefore not be wrong to state that the constraints to the implementation of the policy are located in patriarchal nature of the University influencing attitudes and perceptions of gender equity issues, which are usually indifferent and hostile. With these constraints, the policy became choked up and incapacitated. More importantly, that the Policy was produced and funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York may be an indication that the University may not willing to own the document or enforce it. It is therefore not surprising that monitoring and evaluation of the policy implementation is almost non-existent, as indicated by the interviewees. As one of the interviewees stated, "It is only when the policy is implemented that monitoring and evaluation can take place".

It can therefore be argued in this study that having a policy is not enough to guarantee real transformation in the University. Transforming the university to be gender compliant needs more rigorous approach beyond the rhetoric of policy (Mama, 2011). In this regard, the interviewees offered some suggestions on the best approach through which the



University can be transformed. The most striking one was the establishment of the Gender Commission by the Federal Government which would enable the government to monitor the implementation of gender issues in the University and other organisations. This is suggesting that gender equity should be enforced from outside the University, though it may be unlikely, considering the fact that Nigerian legislators have recently kicked against the Gender Equality Bill and ensured that it was not approved by the National Assembly (see, for example, Eniola, 2018). This also implies that members of the National Assembly, who are mostly men, share same orientation with the University administrators who have incapacitated gender policy in the University.

### Some conclusions and recommendations

The paper has established that the gender equity policy has become a victim of the *hidden transcript*. The fact that the policy has yielded little or no tangible improvements in student enrolment, employment and in decision making processes in the University since it was formulated in 2009 calls for urgent attention. Based on this, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Qualified girls and women should be given equal opportunities as their male counterparts to participate in a much better role, particularly in enrolment, employment and in decision making processes in the university;
2. There is need to change the curriculum to include gender as a core course in all disciplines;
3. The Obafemi Awolowo University should put in place structures that will facilitate female academic and non-academic staff to improve themselves alongside men;
4. The university should empower women to build their confidence and assertiveness; and
5. The Ministry of Gender Equality should be created at the Federal level to force universities to adhere to gender equality and gender equity principles.

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