

Beyond Symbolic Inclusion: An Intersectional Analysis of Gender Equity Policies in STEM Across UK and Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

Regardless of increased institutional interest in gender equality in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), there are still inequalities in participation, retention, and representation in leadership roles around the world. This paper reviews the role institutional policies play in achieving gender inclusion in seven partner universities in the United Kingdom and Nigeria as part of the "Breaking the Binary" project. By qualitatively analysing the academic regulations, recruitment structures, policies on admission, curriculum governance, and student handbook provisions of these schools, the operationalisation of gender equality is studied in detail.

Results indicate that there is a general institutional change to gender-neutral language in both national settings. A number of Nigerian institutional documents prioritise inclusive language, indicating institutional promises to gender equality. However, an intersectional reality reveals that such indications are merely symbolic and do not address the socio-cultural realities that women in STEM fields face. These institutional factors can limit the transfer of widely adopted inclusive policy language into institutional change.

Conversely, UK institutions have more formalised governance structures, such as gender equality strategies, accountability systems based on accreditation and systematic gender-based tracking. Though these structures offer better institutional accountability, the problem of unequal disciplinary representation and intersectional inclusion persists.

Index Terms

Gender Equity In STEM; Intersectionality; Higher Education Policy; Institutional Governance; Gender-Neutral Language; UK–Nigeria Comparative Analysis