Higher Education and Gender Equity in South-Western Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria has made enormous strides towards improving access of boys and girls to education at all levels, and in promoting gender equity within the educational system. Yet girl students continue to lag behind in educational achievement and access, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, where girls' enrolment, completion and achievement rates are lower. Girls are under-represented in government schools, and are instead more likely to attend more expensive and lower quality private schools and universities. Despite an enabling policy environment, a number of social and institutional barriers continue to prevent girls and young women from attending schools and universities and from performing equally to their male classmates. Addressing gender equity in the education system, with a focus on improving girls' educational performance and outcomes, is crucial to meeting Nigeria's development goals and to protecting women's human rights within the country. To this end, this study aims at finding possible solution to gender inequity in the system. The main objective is to analyse the gap between girls and boys enrolment and completion of schools in selected Nigerian public and private Universities. The study relied on secondary data from Ajayi Crowther University vis-à-vis University of Ibadan. The data for enrolment and convocation of male and female university students are collected as well as present the findings and the possible recommendation. The Chi-square and graph used for the study.

Keywords: *Higher education, Gender, developmental goals and equity*

Introduction

Gender refers to socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men. The difference in roles and responsibilities among women and men stems from our families, societies and culture. The concept of gender includes our expectations about the characteristics, attitudes and behaviours of women and men, and is vital in facilitating gender analysis.

There are quite a few developing countries where levels of female literacy and participation in education are high, but the status of women remains low – Indonesia and Fiji, for example (Nilan 2009). This means that the notable inequalities that persist in women's access to health, economic and political participation as well as good education cannot be attributed solely or even largely to a gender gap in education at the present time.

The status of women in Nigeria is somehow different from that of western countries. Gender is one of the organizing principles of Nigeria's society. Home has been defined as a woman's legitimate ideological and physical space where she performs her procreative role as a mother and wife while a man dominates the world outside the home and performs his productive role as a breadwinner. Men and women are conceptually divided into two separate worlds. The household resources are allocated in the favour of sons due to their productive role. Male members of the family are given better education and are equipped with skills to compete for resources in public arena, while female members are imparted with domestic skills to be good mothers and wives. They are given limited opportunities to create choices for themselves in order to change the realities of their lives. (JICA, 2011)

Education is the most important instrument for human resource development. It has become a universal human right and an important component of opportunities and empowerment of women. A large number of empirical studies find that increase in women's education boosts their wages and that returns to education for women are frequently larger than that of men. There are many empirical evidences that, increase in female education improves human development outcomes such as child survival, health and schooling (*World Bank 2001, Schultz 2002, Strauss and Thomas 1995, King and Hill, 1993, World Bank 2007*). *Klasen* (2002) explored that lower female education had a negative impact on economic growth as it lowered the average level of human capital. According to *Knowles et al* (2002), in developing countries female education reduces fertility, infant mortality and increases children's education.

Gender Inequalities in education exist in almost all poor countries and among the poor within these countries. There has been a considerable increase in gender inequality in education in low income countries over the last three decades (World Bank, 2001), which is now about four decades. Gender inequality is now considered as an essential concept for the analysis and alleviation of poverty because of its adverse impacts on a number of valuable development goals. Girl's access to education is influenced by poverty in various ways. Recent evidence from West Africa suggests that Poverty has much contribution in gender inequality in access to education (Okoijie, 1998; Okoijie, 2002; Appleton, 1996; Atolagbe, 1999).

In Nigeria, progress towards gender equality has been mixed. Gains have been made in education, but inequalities in access and outcomes for male and female students persist. Overall, Nigeria from all ethnic groups and religious faiths favour education for both sexes. She has made a commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Education for All (EFA), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These conventions have specific policies to promote gender equality in education, including building the capacity of educational institutions to manage and promote gender sensitive education. Achieved or increasing gender parity at all levels of education indicates that good progress is being made towards targets being met.

However, as indicated above, high levels of female literacy and participation in education do not necessarily guarantee that there will be equality in labour market status and income, nor that women will be well-represented in the public life of a country. Changes favouring gender equity in the public domain often take decades to influence change in the private domain of marriage and the family, where the submissive role of women is deeply entrenched.

Nigeria is classed as a lower-middle income country by the World Bank. She has a National Gender Policy which focuses on women empowerment while also making a commitment to eliminate discriminatory practices which are harmful to women. Significant gender gaps in education, economic empowerment and political participation remain in Nigeria. While progress towards parity in primary school education has been made, there remains a significant wage and labour force participation gender gap.

The major objective of the study is to analyse the gap between girls and boys enrolment and completion of schools in selected Nigerian public and private Universities. The paper is organized as follows; Section II briefly presents the profile of gender dimensions of education and Public/Private University in Nigeria. Section III describes the data and methodological issues. Section IV explains the results and discussion. Finally, conclusions and policy implications are discussed in Section V.

Literature review

Importance of Girl-child education cannot be over emphasis. The dividends of education for a girl-child are numerous to mention. These include better management of the home environment, effective use of health services, application of improved hygiene and nutrition practices, reduced fertility, lower child mortality, longer life expectancy, better child health care, smaller families and better educated children. In addition, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007) revealed that girls' education does not only bring the immediate benefits of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country's development. Education for the girl-child also provides the opportunity for the development of essential skills such as, self-confidence, effective participation in educational activities, protection against HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and self-reliance among others. Educating a girl-child is a powerful force of development, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where social welfare and economic advancement are constrained by population growth and a weakly developed human resource base, especially in the area of science and technology (African Academy of science). Similarly, Achunine (2007) stated that empowering women intellectually, socially and politically using education as an instrument is imperative for redressing gender imbalance and enhancing the participation of women in decision making, family life, community development and nation building. This can be achieved through improved enrolment of female gender in schools in general and Science and Technology in particular.

Private and Public University

To Belfied and Lerin (2003), private universities are non-public or independent universities who do not receive governmental funding and are usually administered by denominational or secular boards; others are universities operated for profit. Ndebbio (1983), Olaniyan (2001), also refer to private universities as those universities that are solely owned, financed and managed by private individuals with intention to recover cost in short time and make profit. The first federal university was established in 1948 (University of Ibadan), while the first state university was established in 1979 (Rivers State University of Science & Technology, Port Harcourt). However, the first set of surviving private universities were established in 1999 (Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, and Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State) this was according to Obasi (2006) as a result of the public failure theory expounded in classic literature as we have in Mexico and Peru and the demand absorption as public university education falls short of new demand. Kitaev (2003), in his own view concluded that the concept of privatization paved way for privatization of education, even in Eastern Europe, France, China where private-public ownership of educational institutions was alien, globalization and constant increase in the demand for education have changed their thinking.

Late last year, 2011 the federal government approved the establishment of four new private universities, bringing their number to 49 compared to 70 universities financed by federal and state governments. Who would have predicted this phenomenal increase in 1999 when three private universities blazed the trail and marked a turning point in the history of higher education in Nigeria? Opinions differ regarding the quality, access and mission of these private universities. Nonetheless, they constitute an alternative approach to—and certainly fill a growing niche in—higher education in Nigeria today. In 2010, the National Universities Commission approved the admission of 138,000 new students for public universities and about 32,000 for private universities.

Despite the limited carrying capacity of private universities, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of prospective students applying for places in them.

Education Attainment and Gender Equality

As we know, schooling indicates education attainment which is more likely to result in good job opportunities, high social status, economic independence, resource allocation, capacity to participate in public life, as well as leadership. All of these are necessities to human rights and needs, justice, economic and social benefits, and equality. Half a century after the claim for education rights in the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s, there is significant global progress in women's education attainment. Yet, we are still far from achieving gender equality.

No doubt, girls and women are taking advantages of education. Education delivers knowledge and skills that make women more informed and render them the capacity to meet their needs and achieve their benefits, not only for themselves, but also for their children. Worldwide empirical evidence shows us that the schooling of women is strongly associated with more participation in the economy, low child mortality, lower fertility rate, better nutrition, and more education for the next generation. While the investment in primary education fuelled the economic take-off in East Asia, more women were involved in the labour market and increased their income in combination with higher education levels. The World Bank Report on *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy* stated that high performing Asian economies closed the gender gap in education much earlier than other countries with the same level of per capita income. Although it is universal education without a specific focus on girls, the benefits for girls and women are significant (World Bank 1993: 47).

However, higher education attainment did not result in closing the gender gap in many fields. It is easy to find a bunch of studies which revealed a "Kuznets effect" between human capital, in terms of education and income (Winegarden 1979; Gregorio and Lee 2002). They show us that inequality in education actually widens the income gap while advancement in education attainment increases the general income level.

Although education is an important instrument to achieve gender equality, schooling on its own does not result in ending the gender gap. For example, the second national survey of Women Status of China in 2000 reported a greater gap in income between the two sexes and between rural and urban women, despite the fact that the average schooling years increased in all of these groups. Compared with 1990, the average schooling years of women in 2000 went up by 1.4years, to 6.1 years, while average schooling of men went up from 6.7 to 7.6 years. The gap between two sexes in schooling was reduced by 0.4 years. Meanwhile, during 10 years, the income gap of the two sexes increased by 7.4 percent (ACWF and National Bureau of Statistics 2001).

More cases could be given. The glass-ceiling is still discouraging women with higher education. Domestic violence is pervasive in all the races, cultures and classes, whatever income and education background they have. The gender inequality in family, school, workplace and other social settings are perpetuated by bias, social norms, law, culture, public policies and exacerbated by other institutional factors. Education attainment is leading the way to gender equality. However, barriers coming from institutions, ideology and social bias are slowing progress and we need strategies and interventions integrating other empowerment approaches. In particular, we need to be aware of the gender inequality rooted in the education system itself. Education, like other social settings, is constructing and reinforcing the gender bias and discrimination. For example - the biased textbook

and curriculum, gender-blinded school policies, gender stereotypes in classrooms are propagating gender inequality through education.

*Gender equity is t*he condition in which women and men relate to one another and to social phenomena (such as the state, the economy, education systems) as equals, with equal access to resources, benefits and opportunities to exercise control. The promotion of gender equity stems from the established fact that women and men often benefit differently and unequally from opportunities and resources.

Government effort at improving access to education thus far

In Nigeria, an order mandating a compulsory nine years of basic education was implemented in 2004. This situation is being addressed by current efforts of the Nigerian Government with the implementation of the Basic Education scheme. The compulsory, free Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act was passed into law in 2004 and represents the Government's strategy to fight illiteracy and extend basic education opportunities to all children in the country. Recently, the government announce the establishment of Almagiri model schools in northern part of the country.

However the number of schools, facilities and teachers available for basic education remain inadequate for the eligible number of children and youths. This is more so in urban areas where there is population pressure. Under these conditions, teaching and learning cannot be effective; hence the outcomes are usually below expectation.

Another challenge in Nigeria is the issue of girls' education. In the North particularly, the gender gap remains particularly wide and the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 girl to 2 boys to 1 to 3 in some States.

Many children do not attend school because their labour is needed to either help at home or to bring additional income into the family. Many families cannot afford the associated costs of sending their children to school such as uniforms and textbooks. For others, the distance to the nearest school is a major hindrance. Another cause of low enrolment, especially in the North, is cultural bias. Most parents do not send their children, especially girls, to school and prefer to send them to Qur'anic schools rather than formal schools.

Most children of both sexes enrol in primary school with no significant gender gap. At junior secondary school level there is a slightly higher ratio of girls, but this must be considered relative to the rural-urban divide. In 2002, while 71.9 percent of children in urban areas enrolled in junior high school, only 54.1 percent of rural children did so. The socio-economic status factor is also important. In 2002 for the poorest 20 percent of the population, only 49.9 percent of children enrolled in junior high school, while for the richest 20 percent of the population, the percentage was 72.2 (UNICEF 2002).

Male and female pupils proceed from primary to junior secondary school in roughly equal numbers. However, there is a gender gap in transition rates from junior secondary to senior secondary school (73 percent of males and 69 percent of females). There is also a significant gender gap in school dropout rates, both at primary and junior secondary levels.

Girls are more likely to drop out. In 2002, at primary and junior high school level, for every ten children who dropped out, six were girls and four were boys. At senior secondary school level, seven girls dropped out for every three boys).

However, once again this has to be considered relative to rural-urban differences 'for senior secondary education, rural urban differentials outweigh gender ones' (DFID 2007). Literacy rates

were even at 99.8 percent in 2002 (UNICEF 2002). Over the last decade the number of females has come to equal the number of males in higher education. The current enrolment rate is about 15 percent of the eligible cohort (DFID 2007).

In summary, even while acknowledging that access to education becomes increasingly more limited as children proceed to higher levels of education, Nigeria has achieved good overall progress towards gender parity in the net enrolment ratio both at the primary and junior secondary levels (UNICEF 2002).

Unequal outcomes from schooling
However, despite the laudable gains in education, significant barriers to achieving gender equitable outcomes from schooling include: gender biased teaching and classroom practices; sexual harassment; lack of safety in some areas for girls going to and from school; and the continued wide use of textbooks that reinforce gender stereotypes. For example, males are depicted far more often and in more active and authoritative roles than females. The names of prominent men are cited more often. Gender stereotyping still prevails in choice of subjects and study strands at secondary school, leading to different labour market incomes that inhibit the involvement of women in high profile public life. National policies certainly exist to promote gender equitable outcomes from education, but they encounter many obstacles, not least of which are old-fashioned thinking, religious conservatism, inertia and corruption.

The message for girls still tends to be that while their educational achievements remain on par with boys at school, their main purpose in life after education is to marry and be the helpmate of their husband, raising his children and meeting his needs. This is not an ideal scenario from which to build a life trajectory that includes a high profile in public life.

Gender-aware strategy for education
Effective policy design obviously requires an understanding of the extent and nature of the problems to be addressed. This report shows that gender inequity is usually deeply rooted, and inequity in educational participation and outcomes reflects broader inequities in society. Social norms and customs create powerful incentives that guide people's behaviour, and determine the roles that women and men can have in the family and community. Social norms are embedded in kinship and religious systems that are highly diverse across – and often within – societies. But such norms can and do change in response to environmental and economic change and to broader political and social developments. Change can result from deliberate actions of state or civil society organizations, and from legislative and institutional social reforms. These can influence the expectations and incentives governing human behaviour – including those affecting educational participation and performance.

Decisions about participation in schooling are made by families. It is here that notions of gender relations are transmitted from one generation to the next. This happens implicitly via the gender roles that members of the household themselves fulfil, and explicitly through the gender frameworks within which children of each sex are brought up. Households allocate time for different activities among their members, and they also allocate resources – for consumption, savings and investment, including those associated with the formation of human capital – between each of them. These allocations are influenced by the broad social and institutional framework of custom and opportunity in which households are located. But changing the factors that affect household constraints, opportunities and incentives is a critically important means of influencing their decision-making.

Role of the government for the future

The government's role in this is important in at least three principal ways: *creating an enabling environment* for promoting gender equity in education through legislative and policy reform; *investing in redistribution*, by targeting resources for female education and introducing special measures to reduce inequities; and *mitigating the burden of external shocks* on girls and women, such as the effects of conflict, economic crisis and HIV/AIDS. Although changes to education policy are critically important, in order to be successful, actions to promote gender parity and equality in education need to be nested within a wider set of measures affecting many other aspects of economy and society.

Data Collection

The data were collected from the collated admission lists and convocation proceedings of the various institutions. University of Ibadan, Ibadan was used as an example of the public institution while Ajayi Crowther University was used as an example of Private institution

The following tables relate to the data collected in the various institutions indicated below:

Table 1.1: The Intakes and Graduates for the Public University.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN (UI), IBADAN

S/NO	SESSION	IN TAKE			GRADUATE		
		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	2003/04	1810	1353	3163	2336	1563	3899
2	2004/05	1899	1267	3166	1563	1256	2819
3	2005/06	1483	1338	2821	1273	1024	2297
4	2007/08	1394	1122	2516	1197	1079	2276
5	2008/09	1644	1540	3184	1290	997	2287
6	2009/10	2038	1758	3796	1333	945	2278
7	2010/11	1796	1732	3528	1279	903	2182

Source: University of Ibadan admission list and convocation proceeding, 2003-11.

Table 1.2: The Intakes and Graduates for the Private University.

AJAYI CROWTHER UNIVERSITY (ACU), OYO

S/NO	SESSION	IN TAKE			GRADUATE		
		MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	2005/06	140	166	306	-	-	-
2	2006/07	270	265	535	-	-	-
3	2007/08	359	336	695	-	-	-
4	2008/09	396	401	797	98	127	225
5	2009/10	416	380	796	156	209	365
6	2010/11	294	320	614	295	283	578

Source: Ajayi Crowther University admission list and convocation proceeding, 2005-11.

Data Analysis

Study has shown that one of the best predictors of gender equity in higher education is the ratio between the male and female students in both admissions (in-takes) and graduates tertiary institution. One standard measure of the ratio is the percentage while the relationship can be verify by using chi-square.

Chart 1.1: Analysis of the Intakes in Public University
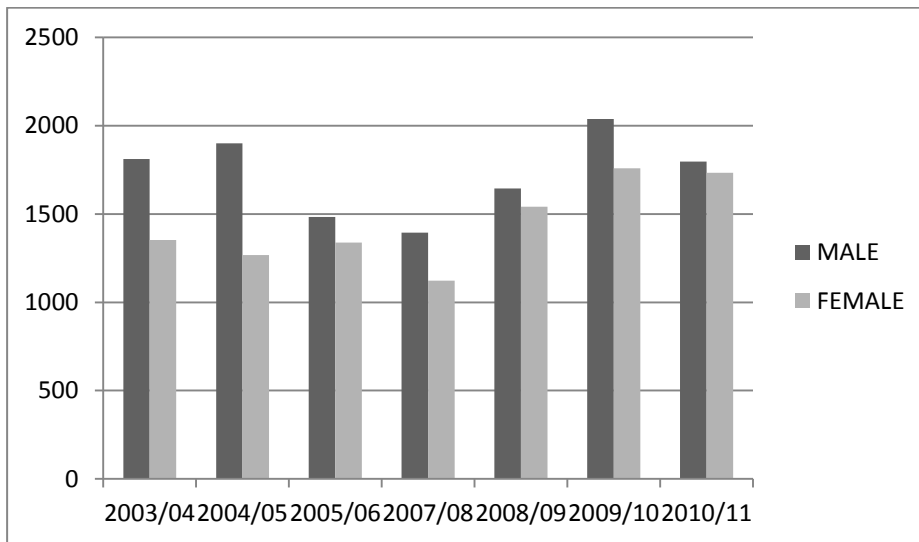
Source: Authors', 2012

It was observed that student intakes have been on the increase in public school but for 2005/06 and 2007/08 when Nigeria University Commission (NUC) enforced the maximum limit of students to be admitted based on carrying capacity. It should be noted that 2006/07 session was cancelled. Particularly, the no of male students are more than female students, but the gap in their differences is considerably closing up.

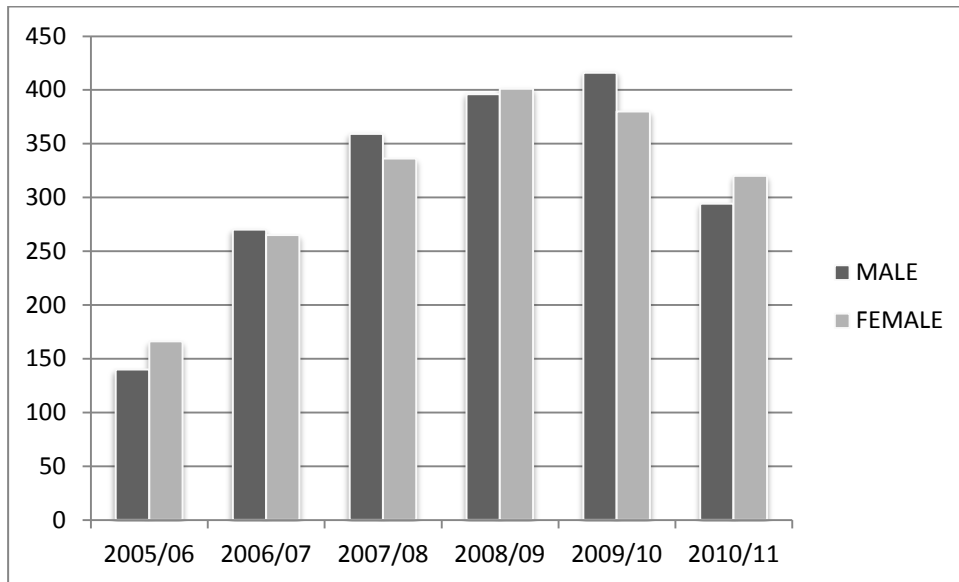**Chart 1.2: Analysis of Graduates in Public University**
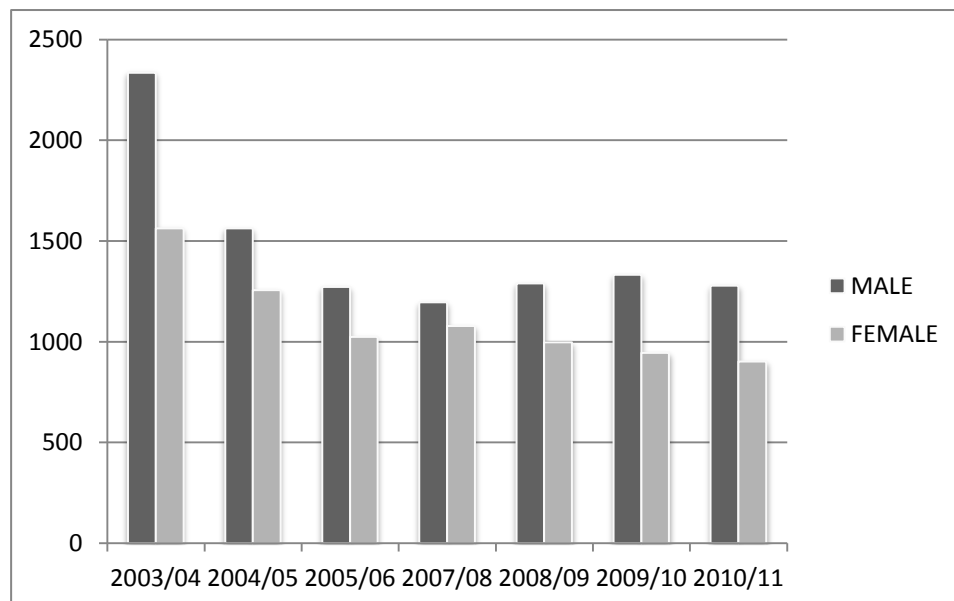
The gap in the difference between the no of male and female at graduation has also reduced considerably. The fall in the total number of first degree graduates over the years has been as a result of low no of intakes for first degree courses.

Chart 1.3: Analysis of the Intakes in Private University

Source: Authors', 2012

Chart 1.4: Analysis of the Intakes in Private University
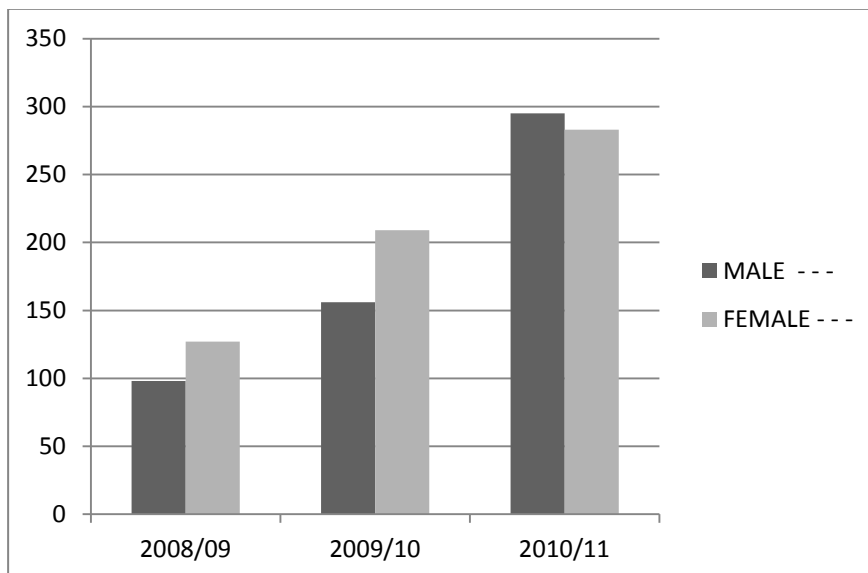
Source: Authors', 2012.

Results and Discussion

The proportion of female students that attend private university are more than their male counterparts. Our findings reveal that the more female students attend private university than public university. Furthermore, there is proportional increase in the rate of intakes as well as the graduates of the private university.

There is a balance ratio in the intakes and graduates of the private university.

Conclusion

The study has helped to know that more female students attend private university than male students. Secondly, the gender equity is better in the private university compare to public university. Public institution has helped in producing more male graduates than female graduates.

From the result of the chi-square computed, it was discovered that the female intakes in public university is improving in order to close up the wide gap that exist between the male and female students. While the consistent minor difference observed at the private university is gradually becoming infinitesimal. But on the average, the performance of the female students are better than the male counterparts during graduation at both private and public university considering their lower turn out rate.

It must be emphasized, however, that rapid progress towards gender equity can be made by Nigeria country. Planning and policy reform is capable of bringing the nation closer to achieving gender equity over the next decade, provided that it is supplemented by strong external support from the aid community and government in particular. As regards the gender goals, even for the country likely to fail to reach gender parity at primary and secondary levels, policies are available to speed up their transition, and in such circumstances their longer-term prospects to 2015 are more promising.

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